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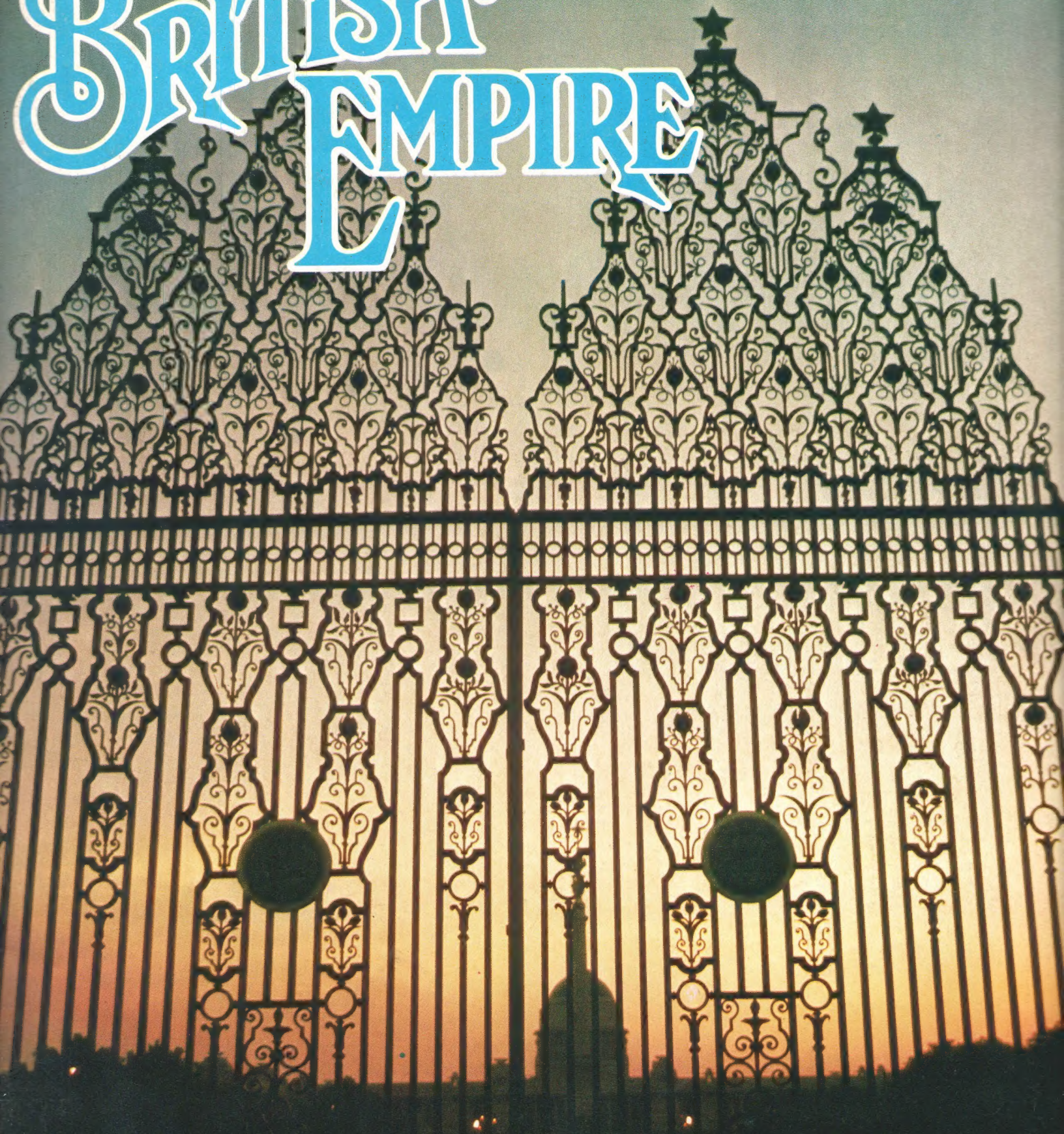

THE IMPERIAL MACHINE

The bureaucracy behind the edifice of Empire

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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Errata

In No. 35 GUARDIANS OF EMPIRE the Publishers regret the following errors, for which the Author is in no way responsible:

p. 954: first column, line 15: delete "early." **p. 958:** second column, delete second paragraph. **p. 958:** second column, last paragraph: "after this classic 18th-Century action" should read "later." **p. 964:** first column, line 17: should read "*Soldier*, Major-General J.F.C. Fuller in 1936." **p. 968:** 21 lines from bottom: "enlisted man" should read "private soldier." **p. 979:** first column, 9 lines from bottom: delete "there was always a safe 1 to 3 proportion of white to native troops." Insert "was always" after "one British battalion." **p. 979:** third column, 5 lines from bottom: should read "In 1881, one-battalion regiments 'linked' under the Cardwell reforms were re-formed in new two-battalion regiments, sometimes with new county titles." **p. 980:** first column, 10 lines from bottom: "super" should read "'great'." **p. 980:** third column, last paragraph: delete the sentences "Ironically . . . 17th Century" and "But then . . . 20th Century."

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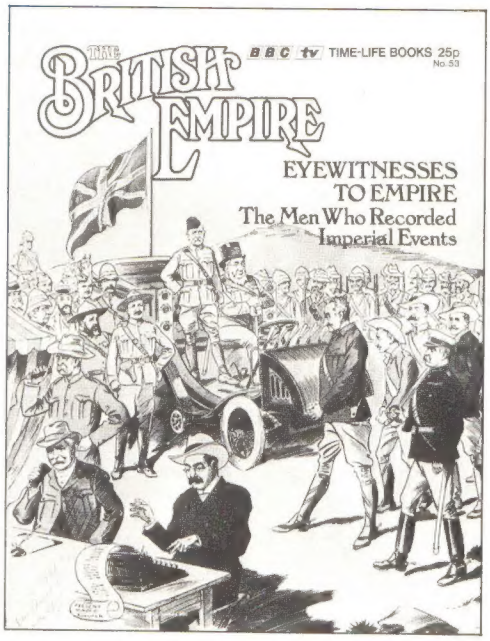

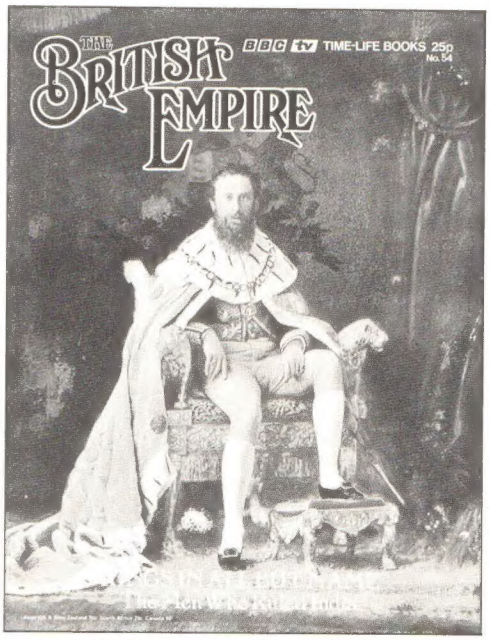

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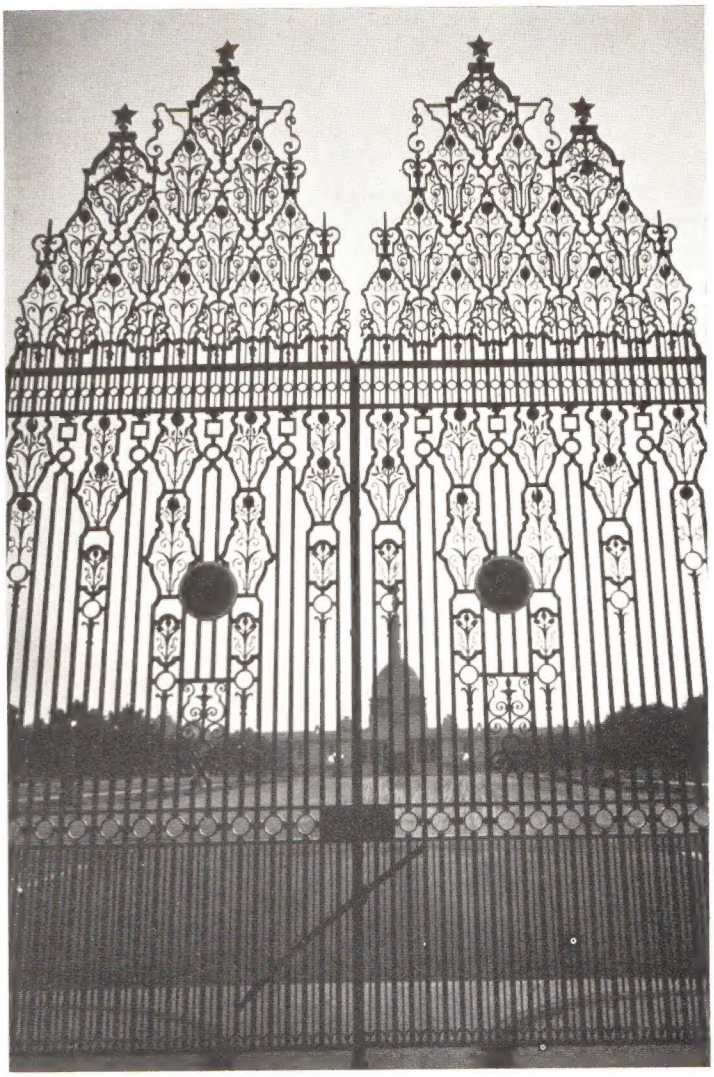
Cover: The gates of the Viceroy's residence in New Delhi were designed by the British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens whose greatest work was the building of New Delhi as an imperial capital between 1913 and 1930.



The Viceroy's imposing gates symbolized British power in India.

THE IMPERIAL MACHINE

No one "ran" the British Empire in the sense of a board of managers running a business. It was far too large and far too diverse for any monolithic bureaucratic machine, residing behind a single pair of gates, to control successfully. The Crown, Parliament, the Colonial Office, the India Office, colonial governments, the legal system: all were axles on which the machine ran. But they were not linked together by any coherent or effective mechanism. Tiny cogs – officials in the colonies or even London itself – could whirr away for months on end without anyone paying much attention.

By Trevor Reese

In the late 19th Century, the Empire was a vast and complex structure of 400 million people, made up of a multiplicity of races and countries differing in customs, law, religion and language. There were the self-governing colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; the Indian subcontinent, Ceylon and Burma; tropical protectorates and dependencies; and a mass of smaller territories and bases.

Naturally this hotch-potch of groups threw up an enormous variety of political, diplomatic, social and economic problems. Subject peoples who were backward had quite different needs from those of relatively advanced peoples. Governing Sierra Leone was not the same as governing Mauritius. Some territories acquired representative institutions faster than others.

An Empire of such disparate elements could not possibly operate as a monolithic system. The imperial machine consisted of several different elements: Parliament, British and local law, government office at home and on the spot – all these played their separate parts.

There was no uniform legal system, but different blends of imperial and local law. India had a penal code of its own devised by Thomas Babington Macaulay; Quebec kept a civil law derived from France. Mauritius and the Seychelles had the Napoleonic Code; South Africa and Ceylon used mainly Roman-Dutch law; Malta maintained Sicilian law. Colonies of British settlement naturally leaned heavily on English experience for their statute law, following English textbooks, borrowing English interpretations, and benefiting from English draftsmanship. Their legislatures often copied English statute law. One Australian colony even solemnly enacted a part of the English Sale of Goods Act stating that the act was not to apply to Scotland.

But there was a single supreme court of appeal for the whole Empire. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council met in Downing Street and issued binding decisions on appeals from all over the Empire, even when the legal systems were not essentially British in origin or form. This tribunal provided a sense of unity at the apex of the Empire's complex legal structure, and dispensed justice with an urbane assuredness, finding nothing incongruous in giving verdicts on issues that affected wheat farmers of Canada on one occasion and gold prospectors of Western Australia the next.

In theory, all imperial power was exercised in the name of the Crown, whose symbolic significance was immense. The Queen was the highest constitutional authority in every part of the Empire: she was the executive head of each government, her assent was required for legislation to become effective and her refusal to give assent negated a bill. It is difficult to decide how much influence the existence of the God-Queen had on the attitudes of subject peoples towards their imperial rulers, but that there was such influence cannot be doubted. The almost mystically remote figure who sat on the imperial throne in London was the fount of imperial authority.

The Queen's representatives in every colonial government enjoyed something of her god-like aura, particularly her representative in India, the Viceroy. He enjoyed the most coveted, magnificent and resplendent of all posts in the overseas administration of the Empire. Naturally, such an office was regarded as best suited to aristocrats of the soundest pedigree, who presumably knew how to conduct themselves properly in the palatial way of life they were expected to lead in Calcutta. The Viceroy acted and lived, indeed, as a monarch, except that his tenure of office was limited. His surroundings were elaborate and luxurious, and as the Queen might retire to the Isle of Wight, or another of her country homes at certain times of the year, so, periodically, and especially when Calcutta became intolerable at the height of the summer, the Viceroy retired to his palace at Simla, in the hills of the Punjab.

In each colony, the Queen's representative was the Governor who, like the Viceroy in India, but not on the same glamorous scale, normally enjoyed something of the aura of royalty. The Governor's commission was held under the royal sign manual and signet and his power derived from letters patent issued under the great seal. He wrote his minutes and signed his initials in red ink. He usually lived in an imposing residence, "Government House," where the Union Jack flew every day from sunrise to sunset. He was addressed as "His Excellency" and his appearance on a public occasion was the signal for the national anthem to be played.

The Governor exercised the royal prerogative of mercy and carried out "royal" instructions. His functions, however, were in practice carried out under the direction, not of the Queen but of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. He addressed his dispatches to the Secretary of State, who sent him the instructions on which he was expected to act. He was required to consult his executive council in the colony on all matters related to the exercise of his powers and, although he might reject his council's advice, he had to report the circumstances of such a rejection.

Colonial governors in the middle of the 19th Century came mostly from the senior ranks of the army or navy, and were men with an upper middle-class background. Governing a colony was then regarded as a natural extension of an officer's job, but later on in the century an increasing number of governors were men who had made the colonial service their whole career. Practically all governors moved from one territory to another in a succession of different appointments, so building up their experience. Sir Henry Barkly, the son of a West Indian merchant, was successively Governor in British Guiana, Jamaica, Victoria (Australia), Mauritius and Cape Colony between 1848 and 1877. Sir Arthur Gordon was Lieutenant-Governor in New Brunswick and Governor in Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, New Zealand and Ceylon between 1861 and 1890. Sir George Grey was Governor in South Australia, New Zealand and Cape Colony between 1841 and 1868.

The quality of the governors in the 19th Century was generally good, but some were more tactful than others in their dealings with local interests and the Colonial Office. Sydney Olivier believed that the majority of colonial governors were "exceedingly stupid," and other Colonial Office officials thought many of them were "inferior" and only serving in the colonial service because they had failed to make a success of anything else. Sir George Bowen, who was successively Governor in Queensland, New Zealand, Victoria, Mauritius and Hong Kong between 1859 and 1885, was unflatteringly described by officials in Whitehall

as a "wind bag" and "pompous donkey," and there were other governors who drew similarly barbed comments from civil servants in Downing Street.

The Governor, like the Queen, was not only the head of government but also the pinnacle of social life. A well-ordered social consciousness was a useful lubricant in the machinery of imperial administration, and the Governor and his wife were expected to maintain and foster it. A Governor was required to observe the niceties of social protocol in his colony, as the Queen and her advisers observed them in London. He and his wife organized and attended balls, dinners, bazaars, polo, horse-racing, and perhaps even fox-hunts, and their presence at any function was deemed an honour to it. Garden parties were as much a part of the social scene in the colonies as they were in English society, and the Governor and his wife had to find time in their programme to drink tea under the trees in the garden with the social élite of their community.

"Those garden parties!" sighed Margaret Brooke, recalling her days as the Rajah's wife in Sarawak in the 1870s. "How can I ever forget the swift change from day into night." Sarawak, though not formally part of the Empire, functioned socially in much the same way as other British colonies, where the lifestyle of the English aristocracy lost little except its inferior climate when transplanted to the tropics. "Often, before parting for the night, we would look over towards the north, to Santubong, the mountain by the sea, whose jagged outline bears a striking resemblance to the profile of the great White Rajah. 'See,' the women would say to me, 'the gods were aware of his advent in Sarawak and drew his picture for ever across the sky.' Then my friends would get into their canoes and return to their homes. I would watch the boats receding from my sight, the paddles making a pretty rhythmic sound as they ploughed up the water. Our fun had ended for the day."

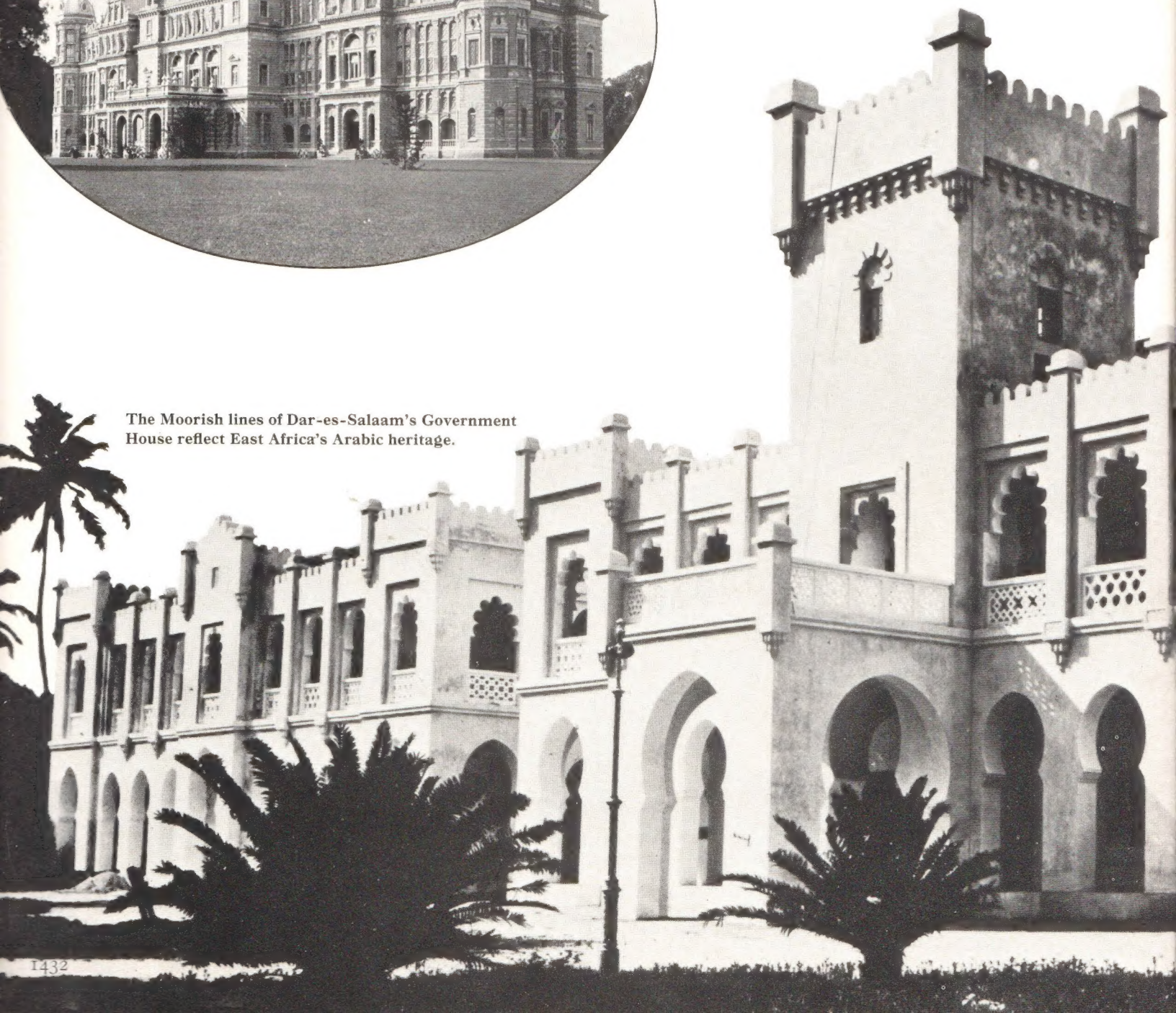
Indians in Bombay gaze at the statue of Queen Victoria, the mysterious and far-away Empress whose servants ruled their lives.

Next to the Crown in the pyramid of imperial authority was the British Parliament. The Parliament at Westminster was the supreme legislative institution of the Empire, and it was the ultimate source of imperial policy. It was an institution, however, elected by the people of Britain, not the colonies, and it contained few members with any interest in imperial problems. It was interested in Ireland, but Ireland was seen more as a domestic than an imperial problem. There were no votes to be gained from imperial issues, which seldom were even mentioned in election campaigns. Imperial policy was not a matter of any consequence to the political parties at Westminster. Parliament was kept in the dark for most of the time about imperial problems, and even debates on India – the showpiece of Empire – were sparsely attended. Imperial policy was left in the jealous care of the ministers whose responsibility it was, and whose reaction to the very occasional questioning in the house was more often resentful than helpful.

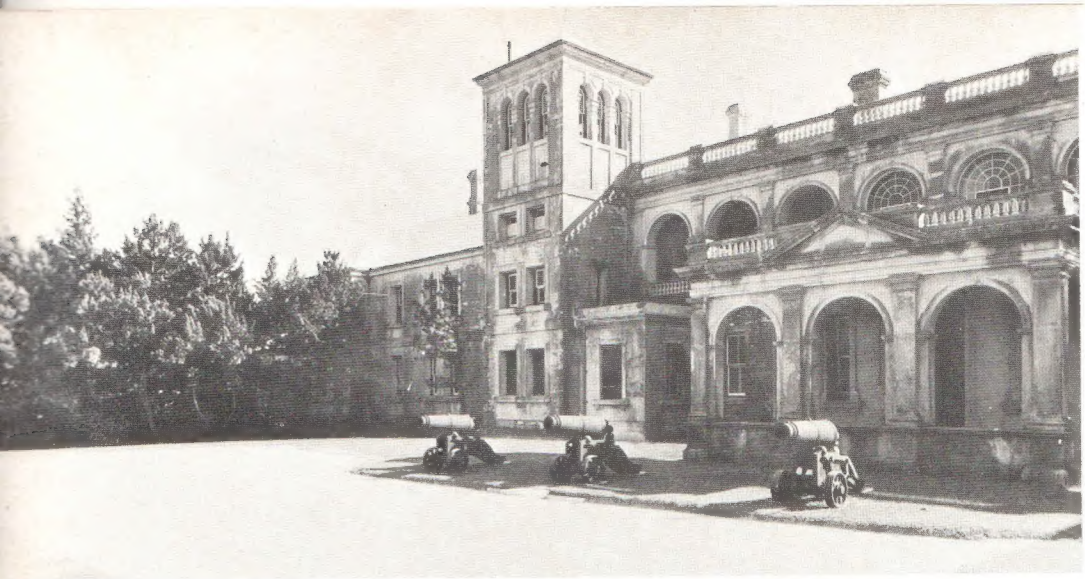
The principal political figures concerned with the Empire were the Secretaries of State – one for India and one for the colonies. They were responsible to Parlia-

Government House in Grenada, British West Indies, is a handsome example of the Caribbean style, but masonry replaced the customary wood construction.

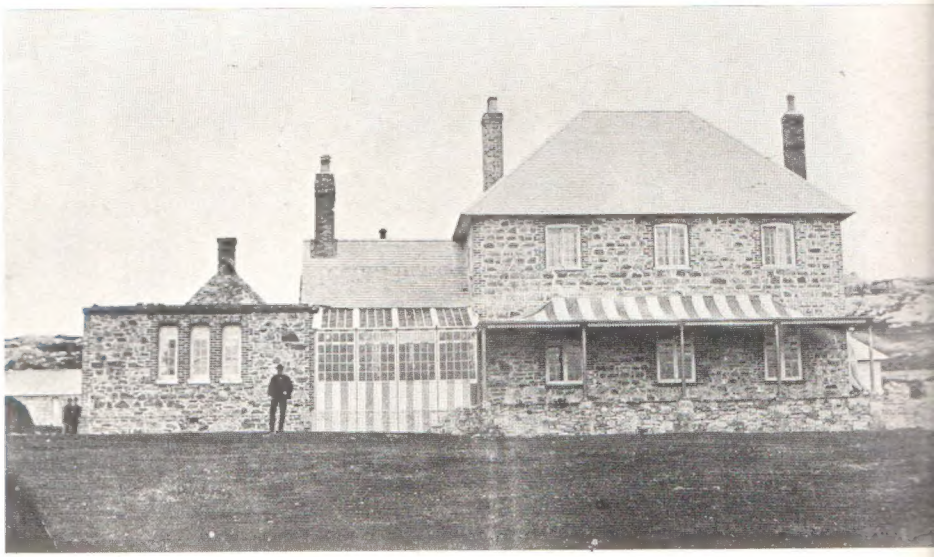
In Rangoon, the pseudo-French-Renaissance structure, erected between 1892 and 1895, must have created a certain amount of surprise among the Burmese.



The Moorish lines of Dar-es-Salaam's Government House reflect East Africa's Arabic heritage.



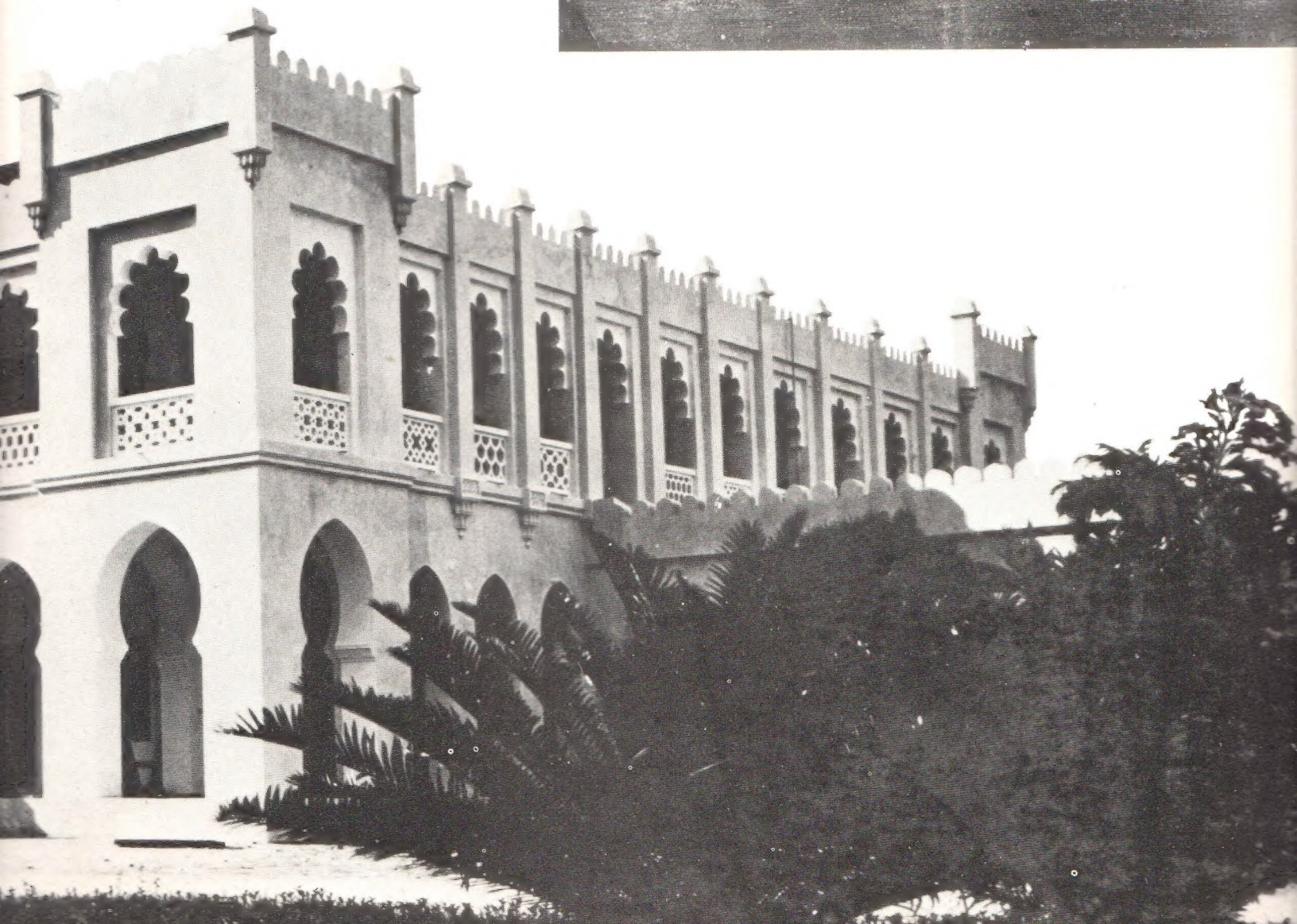
The Italianate tower that distinguishes Bermuda's seat of government was an unconscious tribute to Prince Albert's design for Osborne House.



The Governor of the Falklands lives in this rough-stone house, reminiscent of a Scottish croft and highly appropriate to the bleak and rocky character of the islands.

A HOTCHPOTCH OF STYLES

Colonial Government Houses reflected the taste – or the whim – of officials on the spot.



The sweeping design of Sir Gilbert Scott's Italianate India Office (four views of the interior are seen on the right) has today largely been broken up into box-like offices.

ment, and to their colleagues in the cabinet. To their desks came practically all matters touching India and the colonies, and their policy decisions were transmitted to the Viceroy or governors. Nevertheless, the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies was not regarded as an onerous one and ambitious politicians did not value it except as a stepping-stone to higher offices. No established political figure until Joseph Chamberlain actually sought the appointment. The Secretary of State was not influential in the cabinet, where colonial affairs were regarded as unimportant.

After the significant interlude when Joseph Chamberlain held office at the end of the 19th Century, this tradition of a second-rate job was restored. Sir Ralph Furse, a recruiting officer for the colonial service in the 20th Century, describes the position as "a Cinderella" and concludes that of 17 ministers he personally served under, "too few carried enough weight in the Cabinet to ensure that the needs of the Colonial Empire were adequately met."

Under such circumstances, it is surprising that the calibre of Secretaries of State was so high. The only one in the 19th Century who was demonstrably incompetent was Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, who held the office for just over a year. One of his officials described him as "half mad about his responsibilities," fancying he was going to reform the whole colonial Empire, and he was known to rise in the middle of the night to draft dispatches. In justice to Lytton, it must be added that he led a busy social life, coloured by matrimonial quarrels, and was a versatile writer of verse, drama, novels and miscellaneous prose. Moreover, he would have preferred to have been raised to the House of Lords because, as a member of the Commons, he dreaded his wife's intervention on his campaign platforms.

The Secretary of State for India controlled the India Office in King Charles Street, Westminster, which acted as the communicating channel between the government in India and the government in London. It had a long history from the days of the East India Company, which originally operated from East India House in Leadenhall Street. The Secretary of State and his officials worked there until it was sold in 1861 and replaced by business offices. The India Office inherited from the East India Company a collection of oriental manuscripts and printed works which formed the basis of an excellent library and the major repository of publications on Indian subjects. The library of published works was complemented by a comprehensive collection of records and original papers that became a profitable mine for scholars.

The India Office itself, however, was regarded as a depressing place by those who had to work in it. A Member of Parliament likened it to hell, at the end of whose gloomy corridors one was likely to meet the devil. Possibly its sheer wealth of fine pictures, furnishings, woodwork and sculpture was overwhelming. For the civil servants, these surroundings seemed to emphasize the heavy burden of responsibility that the affairs of India imposed upon them. The India Office, according to one official, was "a miniature Government in itself."

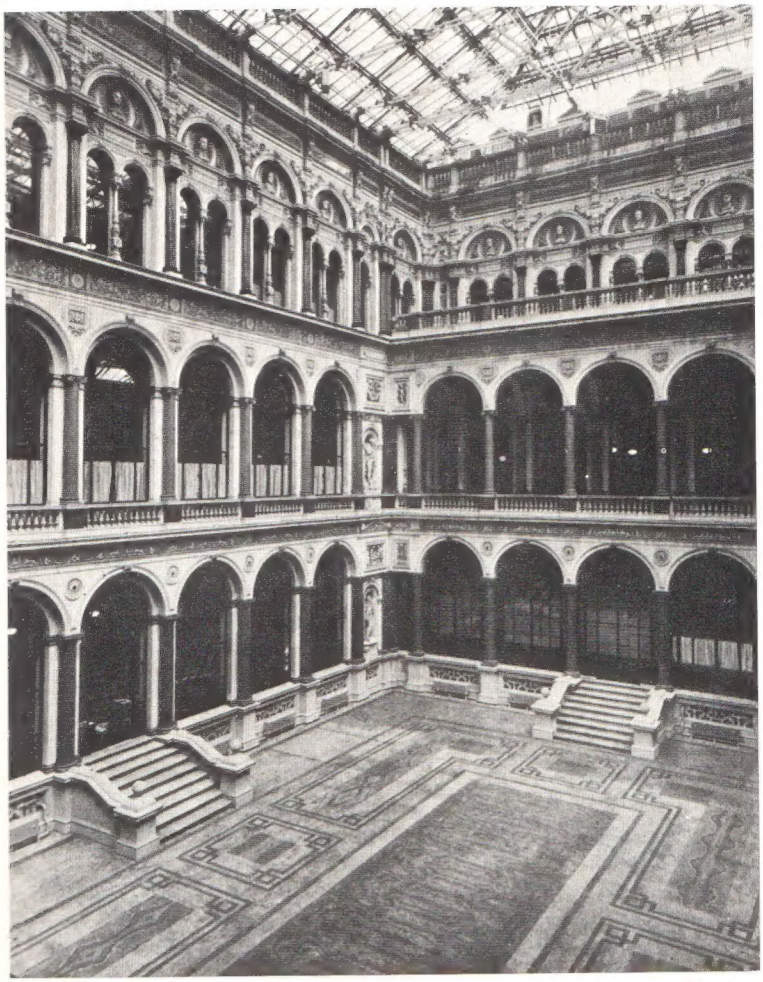
The India Office was responsible for the recruitment of officials sent out from Britain to govern India. The Indian Civil Service was the goal of ambitious university graduates reared in the graces of the upper-middle class of British society. Successful applicants were originally appointed under a "covenant" with the Secretary of State to the executive, judicial and specialized posts. They were distinct from those "uncovenanted" applicants appointed in India who served in the civil administration but under different conditions and for lower salaries. The "uncovenanted" service was recruited largely from Indians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans domiciled in India, and its members were appointed to subordinate positions.

The superior, "covenanted" service was essentially British, and although Indians were eligible to compete for appointment to it, very few were successful and the cream of the executive positions remained a largely British preserve. Open competition for entry to the "covenanted" service was instituted in 1854, and a proclamation by Queen Victoria in 1858 stated that colour, religion or birth were not to be disqualifications for any office in India under the Crown. This did not mean equality of opportunity, however. Indian candidates had to pay their fare to London in order to take the examination, and with the age limit set at 22, they were unlikely to have a second chance if they failed at the first attempt.

There was an unmistakable reluctance among many British administrators to permit a rapid influx of Indians into the higher reaches of the civil service. The process of Indianization must be gradual, declared the Duke of Argyll, "employing only such Natives as we can trust, and these only in such offices as in the condition of things the Government of India may determine to be really suited to them." Sir John Strachey, a senior administrator in India and the author of an early exposition of the principles of British rule there, declared in 1888 that the principal executives in the administration should be Englishmen under all foreseeable circumstances.

This domination of the service by British appointees caused growing criticism in India and led in 1886 to the setting up of a commission to inquire into the employment of Indians. The commission's proposals were accepted by the government, and civil officials were divided into three classes: the Indian Civil Service, recruited in Britain; provincial services, recruited in India from Indians; and subordinate services of lowlier officials such as postal messengers and police constables. The age limit for the examinations in London was raised to 23, and some of the posts in it were opened to transfer from the provincial services. By the end of the century, increasing numbers of Indians were getting to London to compete for entry into the Indian Civil Service, and Lord Curzon, the grandest of viceroys, warned of "the extreme danger of the system under which every year an increasing number of the 900 and odd higher posts that were meant, and ought to have been exclusively and specially reserved, for Europeans, are being filched away by the superior wits of the native in the English examinations. I believe it to be the greatest peril with which our administration is confronted." At that time, less than five per cent of the Service were Indians.

The Indian Civil Service has been accused of maintaining, and even widening, the chasm between the imperial administration and the peoples it ruled.



The Durbar Court was decked with flowers on ceremonial occasions.

From this comfortable room the Secretary of State watched over India.

Long gloomy corridors depressed those who worked in the building.

Immense staircases were a striking feature of Scott's design.

In his tribute to the work of his former colleagues, *The Men Who Ruled India*, Philip Woodruff replies to this argument that there was "more reason for pride than shame" in their conduct and achievement. Indeed, it might appear ungracious to criticize men who took up the challenge for which their upbringing and education had prepared them and which they had been conditioned to believe was their moral responsibility. Of all the non-settlement areas of the Empire, India provided young, middle-class Englishmen with the most glamorous opportunities for the dedicated self-sacrifice and service for which they yearned, a form of moral exploitation that found popular exposition in the full-blooded poetry and prose of Rudyard Kipling and his injunction to take up "the White Man's burden."

But in fact, the British administration in India was neither gentle nor considerate. The men who ruled India were seldom interested in India itself or the people who inhabited it, as Curzon admitted. The administrators were foreigners and conducted themselves as such. They dined together, drank together and played together; they gossiped about the Indians in the exclusive retreat of their social clubs. They often had a cynical and uncomplimentary opinion of the Indian people because those Indians they met were the criminals they arrested or tried and the toadies and the flunkeys who relied on sycophancy for their positions. The Indians, too, very often preferred to keep their distance, not relishing the explicit racial conceit and arrogance with which their rulers were infected. Field-Marshal Lord Roberts attributed the acquisition of India to the inherent superiority of the European: "However well educated and clever a native may be," he declared, "and however brave he may have proved himself, I believe that no rank which we can bestow upon him would cause him to be considered as an equal by the British officer."

The men who ruled India operated an efficient, incorruptible, impartial and impersonal machine. It was so efficient and inflexible that individual initiative and any enterprise in the direction of change were stifled. The task in hand was to administer, and administer well, to maintain order, peace and justice, not to reform. There was little or no vision of what India might become, and little or no concern with solving its problems. The men who ruled India were haughty and imperious by nature and training, and many of them spurned those they governed. They would not be hurried into letting the Indian people assume more political responsibility than was good for them, and were imbued with the notion that British rule was not only efficient and incorruptible, which it was, but also a privilege and a boon for the ruled, which was less certain.

The responsibilities of the India Office in London and the Indian Civil Service were manifold and complex, but at least they were largely confined to one recognizable geographical area. The responsibilities of the Colonial Office encompassed all corners of the globe. The old Colonial Office premises had been at No. 14, Downing Street, but were for a long time in a dilapidated state and in 1837 were condemned. It was not for 38 years, however, that new quarters were occupied, and until then the staff were required to work in "temporary" and very poor conditions. The roof leaked, doors would not close, the corridors were draughty, faulty chimneys belched smoke into the building, and cracks in the walls and ceilings added to the general atmosphere of decay.

Finally, in 1875 the Colonial Office moved into a new block of buildings on the corner of Whitehall and Downing Street. The design of the new buildings was Italian Renaissance, on the order of Lord Palmerston, who vetoed the Gothic plans originally drawn up by the architect, Gilbert Scott. The Crown Agents, who provided for the wants of colonial governments, occupied the basement and ground floor; the Secretary of State was situated on the first floor; the library was on the second floor; and clerks worked on the second and third floors.

The Secretary of State's room was large and stylish. At one end was a globe that turned on its axis and remained a feature well into the 20th Century. It is difficult to believe, remarks Sir Cosmo Parkinson, who became permanent under-secretary in the Colonial Office in the 20th Century, that Secretaries of State in the Victorian era "can have resisted the temptation to pose for their portraits with one hand resting upon this symbol of world-wide imperial sway." The room was also distinguished by an attractively carved, 18th-Century chimney-piece that had been preserved from the old building and incorporated into the new. Beside the fireplace hung a portrait of George Washington, a salutary reminder of the possible consequences that might flow from a misguided colonial policy.

The new premises were an improvement in that officials had less incentive than earlier to take their work home in the evening, as they had done previously to avoid doing it in crowded, inconvenient and uncomfortable offices. As the volume of business increased, however, the new premises became as inadequate as the old. An unreliable lift was a source of nervous anxiety for those who dared travel in it, and when stoppages occurred it was customary to ask the Admiralty for help. The rooms were dimly lit by candles in antique candlesticks and poorly maintained gas lights that gave the staff eye strain until electric light was installed in some rooms under Joseph Chamberlain. Many of the rooms were small, some were peculiarly shaped, the windows became progressively dirtier and unpleasant smells from undiscoverable sources added to the depression. The ceilings were unusually high, an architectural feature that had wasted a lot of valuable space. There was nowhere to store the mounting accumulation of records and files, which had to be deposited on any available floor space and were frequently left lying about the corridors. It is surprising that in such an overcrowded building, efficiency and devotion remained prominent characteristics of the staff.

All official communications to and from the colonies passed through the Colonial Office, whose business routine was founded on the circulation of paper. It was a routine that had been passed down from the days of Sir James Stephen, who had become permanent under-secretary in 1836 and, according to a witty observer, Charles Buller, perfected the "art of irrelevant and apparently purposeless correspondence, by which he manages to spin out the affair." It was not altogether a fair charge, for the office routine was still in its formative stages, and the colonial Empire was an especially com-

Old Boys Who Ran India

In this photograph of students at the East India College at Haileybury, two of the young men – Mr. Middlemass (front, second from right) and Mr. Oliphant (rear, far left) had reason to look solemn. They were well towards the bottom of their class, and usually about one-fifth of the students failed to graduate.

The college, founded in 1806, produced generations of administrators for India until it closed in 1857. (It reopened as an independent public school in 1862.) As the monthly report (right) shows, studies included Oriental languages, but also more general subjects. The teaching staff, recruited from Oxbridge, was impressive: Thomas Malthus, author of the famous treatise on population, taught there for 30 years.

Despite the rigorous scholastic demands, the young men were notorious for their wild behaviour, drunkenness and local wenching. Yet out of shared memories of riotous times, Haileybury old boys forged an esprit de corps that carried them through the daunting task of administering India.

EAST-INDIA COLLEGE.

Monthly Report

OF THE

PROFICIENCY AND CONDUCT OF THE STUDENT

FOR SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, 1857.

Fourth Term.

NAMES.	CLASSICS.	MATHEMATICS.	POL. ECONOMY AND HISTORY.	LAW.	SANSCRIT.	TELUGU.	PERSIAN.	HINDUSTANI.	GENERAL CONDUCT.	CHAPEL.	LECTURES
CRAIGIE	G	G	G					P	Very correct		
MIDDLETON	G	G	G	G	Ægt	....	Ægt	P	Exemplary	Very regular	Ditto
ELLIOT	G	P	G	G	G	....	P	G	Very correct	Not regular	Regular
MIDDLEMASS	L	P	G	G	G	G	....	G	Ditto	Regular	Very regular
MANGLES	G	P	G	G	P	P	....	P	Correct	Very irregular	Not regular
WYLLIE	G	P	G	G	P	....	P	P	Very correct	Not. regular	Quite regular
PARK	G	P	G	P	L	....	Ægt	G	Correct	Irregular	Very regular
OLIPHANT	G	P	G	G	P	Ægt	....	P	Ingeneral correct	Not regular	Ditto
LYALL	P	P	P	G	P	....	G	P	Exemplary	Regular	Quite
BURNEY	G	P	G	G	P	....	L	P	Ingeneral		

plex responsibility, but the lack of any mechanism for discriminating between the important and the trivial meant that all matters had to go through the whole circulation process from the lowest to the highest level and back.

Throughout the 19th Century and into the 20th Century, it was customary for the more senior officials in the office to arrive at about 11.00 in the morning. Subordinate clerks arrived earlier and prepared the day's business for their seniors, who stayed later in the afternoon or evening until the work was completed. On the whole the office exuded a leisurely calm that struck all who visited it. The calm was evidence of the manner with which business was managed rather than of the volume of business, which was growing throughout the 19th Century.

Incoming communications arrived in the office in white, sealed canvas bags and were numbered and registered with related correspondence by clerks in the registry. From this beginning, the filing system developed, with all the anomalies, as well as benefits, to which filing systems are prone. It was often difficult to decide which file a dispatch or communication properly belonged to, and an item relevant to more than one file was often impossible to find when it was wanted. Sir Cosmo Parkinson recalls a search for papers about a maternity hospital "in one of the West African colonies, but no trace of them could be found in the 'Medical' cutting of the register: only after prolonged search was it discovered that a clerk had entered them in the 'Labour' cutting."

A communication was passed from the lower division clerks in the registry to the room of the second-class upper division clerks for minuting. In some instances, a précis might also be made. It was then forwarded to a first-class clerk or departmental head for his comment, and perhaps a suggestion of a suitable reply. If it was important, the matter would be passed through the senior secretariat to the assistant under-secretary or the permanent under-secretary for further comment, and then to the parliamentary under-secretary and, finally, the Secretary of State, for decision. It returned through the same channels to the original department, where the senior clerk or his assistant composed a draft reply embodying the decision reached by his superiors. The draft reply went back up the ladder for approval and down again for copying by women typists, who were introduced into the office in 1893. The typed copy was then sent to the departmental head or under-secretary for signature, and on to the second-class clerks who indexed it and prepared it for mailing. This procedure ensured that all the expertise in the office was brought to bear on a matter, and it had the virtue of being systematic. Although it was laborious even by 19th-Century standards, it does not seem to have prevented the Colonial Office from being remarkably expeditious in dealing with its work.

Those who had business with the Colonial Office often became impatient about delays, but it was prevarication in other departments that was usually to blame. Colonial laws were examined by the Board of Trade, which often knew little and cared less about the majority of them, and then confirmed by the Privy Council, which met infrequently. All expenditure of money overseas was examined by the Treasury, whose approval could never be taken for granted and was seldom quick. In 1840 James Stephen complained that it took as much as "two months on an average to obtain an answer from the Treasury. In several cases the delay has been twelve months or more." The Colonial Office had to wait two years for the Treasury to supply its answer on a question involving Tasmania.

Such delays may sometimes have been a device by the Treasury to discourage unnecessary requests. They certainly tended to have that effect. The very existence of the Treasury, and the knowledge that it demanded a strong *prima facie* case for increased expenditure, meant that the Colonial Office forwarded to it only the most pressing requests and might even reject a colonial application purely on the grounds that it would be futile to put it to the Treasury at all. The close-fistedness of the Treasury might also, of course, be used by the Colonial Office as a convenient excuse for refusing to sanction a colonial proposition with which it disagreed. Although the Treasury was never a popular department, and was viewed by the Colonial Office and other departments as an obstacle to be surmounted or avoided, its reputation for parsimoniousness was not necessarily a handicap to the Colonial Office which was, after all, imbued with the philosophy that the British taxpayers' financial responsibility for the Empire should be kept to a minimum.

Occasionally, delay might be caused by a capricious official. Sir Cosmo Parkinson recalls a senior official in the early 20th Century who merely took home any file that he found disagreeable: "Among his effects when he died, there was a large tin box crammed with official files which he had hidden away there. Doctors say that kind of thing is a disease. And it is a very difficult disease to treat effectively."

By the 1870s, the Colonial Office staff was becoming progressively less able to cope with the mounting paper work, so that even important issues might become delayed. In the single year 1870, about 26,000 letters, dispatches and telegrams entered or left the premises in Downing Street, and three-quarters of these were seen by the Secretary of State personally, who had to authorize instructions and decisions. Sir William Molesworth had made sarcastic play with this in a speech in 1849: "One day the Colonial Secretary is in Ceylon, a financial and a religious reformer, promoting the interests of the coffee planter and casting discredit on the tooth and religion of Buddha; the next day he is in the West Indies, teaching the economical manufacture of sugar; or in Van Diemen's Land, striving to reform the fiends whom he has transported to that pandemonium. Now he is in Canada, discussing the Indemnity Bill and the war of races; anon he is at the Cape of Good Hope, dancing a war dance with Sir Harry Smith and his Kaffir subjects; or in New Zealand, an unsuccessful Lycurgus, coping with Honi Heki; or at Natal treating with Panda, King of the Zulus; or in Labuan, digging coal and warring with pirates; or in the midst of South Africa, defeating Pretorius and his rebel Boers...." At the end of the 19th Century, Molesworth would have been able to add a myriad of other places and activities

Mr. Mother Country

Sir James Stephen (right) was the only official in the 19th-Century Colonial Office who became widely known outside it. He held its senior civil-service post – Permanent Under-Secretary – from 1834 to 1847, but he had worked in the office ever since 1813.

With so long an experience behind him, his advice carried immense authority with the changing Secretaries of State.

This role as an eminence grise attracted the suspicious attention of Charles Buller, a radical imperialist dedicated to colonial reform. Buller pilloried Stephen as a malign influence poisoning colonial affairs from "some back room" in Downing Street. "It is there that the supremacy of the mother-country really resides," he cavilled, shrunk into an individual of whom "we know not the name, the history or the functions." To make good this anonymity, Buller dubbed Stephen "Mr. Mothercountry." The name stuck.

In attacking Stephen's anonymity, Buller aimed well. For if anyone created the tradition of the faceless civil servant, it was Stephen. He was so painfully shy that he remained strictly impersonal, even with his relations.

But when Buller also charged him with inefficiency and corruption, he was wrong. Stephen, escaping society by obsessive hard work, made the Colonial Office probably the most efficient administrative department in Whitehall. Moreover, he was scrupulously upright, for he had been brought up within the Clapham Set, that wealthy and articulate group of Evangelicals which did much to create the Victorian moral outlook, and he saw many of the burning questions of Empire as ethical problems. The mother-country could hardly have had a more sympathetic or balanced understudy to run the everyday affairs of her Empire than "Mr. Mothercountry" himself.

across the African continent and in the Pacific to his colourful list.

For much too long, too much business went to the Secretary of State. Trifling as well as vital matters passed indiscriminately through the system, leading to congestion at the top, where the senior staff were hard pressed to keep the machinery functioning. Responsibility began to be delegated more when Lord Granville became Secretary of State in 1868. Granville was described by Sir Frederic Rogers as "the pleasantest and most satisfactory chief" under whom he had worked. Known affectionately as "Puss," Granville had a relaxed approach to the exercise of ministerial office and avowedly discovered that most letters, if left alone, would answer themselves. Under him, attempts began to be made to trim and overhaul the system, which seemed to be becoming an end in itself. Fewer matters were allowed to traverse the whole course up to the Secretary of State, and subordinates were given more scope to make decisions on less important items. Drafts were no longer bounced methodically back and forth into every section of the office, and by the end of the century the proportion of business reaching the desk of the Secretary of State had been reduced considerably.

At the same time, the growth of business following the "scramble for Africa" in the last 20 years of the 19th Century meant that all the streamlining of procedure did not lessen the work load within the office. Under Chamberlain, at the turn of the century, annual correspondence reached a total of 116,000 items, and the office received or dispatched 9,000 cables in the final year of the Boer War. The staff was engaged on all kinds of subjects, from postal regulations to health problems, public works, colonial appointments, extradition of criminals, trade exhibitions and economic, political and diplomatic questions of varying degrees of importance. The more senior clerks, especially, were only able to retain control over the increasing business by working on Sundays, foregoing holidays and keeping longer hours.

The permanent staff of the Colonial Office ran in descending order from the permanent under-secretary at the top, through assistant under-secretaries, first-class clerks, second-class clerks, a legal assistant, the Secretary of State's principal private secretary, an accountant, a librarian, a chief registrar, a superintendent of printing, a supervisor of copying, a registrar of colonial laws, second-division clerks, messengers and office keepers, down to an office porter at the bottom. In addition, a labourer operated the lift and attended to gas lighting and the heating. The head office keeper supervised the cleaners, messengers, porter and lift attendant, and supplied the clerks with refreshments. The outdoor messengers carried boxes of dispatches between the office and the homes of the most senior staff, while the indoor messengers carried papers between the various rooms and guided visitors. There was also, for a while in the 1870s, an odd-job man who was dismissed for repeated drunkenness.

The staff organization revolved round the geographical departments, each of which dealt with a particular area of the Empire, except for the general department, which was presided over by the chief clerk and dealt with office procedure

and matters affecting the Empire as a whole. Each department was in the charge of a principal clerk assisted by a senior or first-class clerk and two or three second-class clerks, the latter employed mainly in copying, indexing and registering dispatches.

Entry into the ranks of the upper division clerks was, in practice, restricted largely to public school and university men, especially the classic scholar, who found his enjoyment in reading Greek or Latin. Typical, perhaps, was Sir Charles Prestwood Lucas, who entered the Colonial Office in 1877 and rose rapidly to become assistant under-secretary of a newly created emigrants' information office and was a close contender for the under-secretaryship of state in 1907. In that year, the Colonial Office was reorganized so that the business of the Dominions was separated from that of the colonies, and Lucas became first head of the Dominions department. He devoted his retirement mainly to scholastic writing about the Empire, producing several standard works on the subject, and in 1920 he was elected to a fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford.

These men, with their privileged upbringing and education, were all of one recognizable mould. They have been described as heirs of the 18th Century and its traditions. "Style was stamped on them," remarks Sir Ralph Furse; "on the way they looked and behaved, the way they dressed, the way they wrote their minutes." Amid all the bureaucratic paraphernalia, they never lost their taste for classical scholarship. Indeed, they brought it with them to the office. Furse remembers "a beloved senior who always kept a Greek or Latin classic open on his desk, so that he could refresh his mind between files. He would even stop in the middle of a tiresome minute to read a few lines of Homer or titivate his personal translation of an epigram by Simonides." They were intellectuals, refined, cautious and responsible civil servants. Whether they were the kind of men by whom the evolving Empire was best served at its administrative centre, is an open question.

At the apex of the staff structure was the permanent under-secretary, who was responsible for the functioning of the office routine. He was crucial to the whole policy-making process, and his views were usually decisive in determining the allocation of business. He might combine the post with that of legal adviser, and the Secretary of State necessarily depended very heavily on him for advice. The more celebrated holders of the position were to be found in the middle of the 19th Century. The meticulous, thorough, conscientious James Stephen ruined his health by overwork and suffered a nervous breakdown. The devout Frederic Rogers gained a "double first" in classics and mathematics at Oxford and did not allow his conscientiousness and diligence in the work of the office to be impaired by his pessimism about the future for the imperial connection. The taciturn, heavily-built Herman Merivale was the son of an academic, read Latin before he was five, took a first-class degree in classics at Oxford and became a professor of political economy at the university; he played whist from four o'clock until dinner, and wrote magazine articles afterwards.

Unlike the under-secretaries, the assistant under-secretaries were seldom university men, and entered the civil service immediately after school. They were from the same strata of society, however. One of the best known, T.F. Elliot, was a cousin of the Earl of Minto and was educated at Harrow. He possessed independent views, and had no hesitation in voicing his scathing, and often caustic, opinions. The senior clerks were of a similar calibre to the under-secretaries. Perhaps the most notable of their number was Sir Henry Taylor, the senior clerk in the West Indies department for nearly half a century. He entered the office in the 1820s, when he had to work into the early hours of the mornings. His advice was much respected, and after 1861, when severely afflicted with asthma, he was allowed to remain in Bournemouth for four months every year. He was married to the daughter of Lord Monteagle, and was a dramatist and political satirist of no mean order.

The Colonial Office staff was nominated on the authority of the Secretary of State until 1858, after which recruitment was by nomination followed by an examination lasting several days and heavily slanted towards the classics, English prose composition and mathematics. From 1877 recruitment was by open competitive examination, in which classics was still stressed and the qualities of the educated gentlemen were still of considerable importance for success. Inevitably, the public schools and the universities – Oxford and Cambridge – were the major recruiting grounds.

The clerks in the Colonial Office regarded themselves as the superiors, intellectually and administratively, of those who served in the civil service in the colonies. The colonial civil servants were naturally inclined to regard the Colonial Office as uninformed and too academic. There was no unified or consolidated colonial service, and most of the positions were filled by patronage, not by the open competitive examination system that was applied to the home administrative service, the Indian Civil Service and the Hong Kong, Ceylon and Straits Settlements services.

The Colonial Office was a marvellous source of patronage, especially for dropouts: Members of Parliament who had lost their seats, aristocrats who had fallen on bad times and politicians whose removal was thought desirable. Most of the patronage at lower levels was handled by the Secretary of State's private secretaries. The monocled Edward Marsh, who entered the Colonial Office in 1896 and became assistant private secretary to Chamberlain and private secretary to Winston Churchill, asserts that he sat in a back room with an unpaid colleague of about his own age and, subject to the Secretary of State's approval, which was seldom withheld, made all the new appointments to the colonial service. They entered the names, qualifications and credentials of candidates into four large leather volumes, labelled Administrative, Legal, Medical and Treasury, Audit and Customs: "we interviewed them at length," he continued, "and took careful notes of what we called the 'impression' they made; and when a vacancy arose we went diligently through them all and made our submissions." He believed that the system worked as well as any other could have been expected to.

THE CROWN AGENTS

More than law-books and soldiers were needed to run the colonies. Somebody had to organize the supply of paper-clips, desks, railways – and even the inevitable red tape. The Crown Agents were appointed in 1833 to do just that. Ever since, though their wide-ranging, non-profit-making activities are little publicized, they have played a vital part in providing developing countries with everything they could possibly need.

The Crown Agents no longer act only for colonial administrations, and they have stopped using their coat of arms with its royal crest (above), to emphasize their political impartiality to the many public authorities, international bodies (like the U.N.) and governments – many in former colonies – that they now serve.

Suppliers to Empire

Until 1833, a senior clerk at the Colonial Office could look contentedly forward to a sinecure as agent for one of the colonies. He would arrange loans and supplies for a colonial government at a handsome profit. But by the early 1830s, complaints from the colonies about the inefficiency and dishonesty of the system were becoming too vociferous to be ignored. In 1833 two Colonial Office men, styled "Joint Agents General for Crown Colonies," were made responsible by Parliament for the needs of the 13 Crown Colonies that then existed. Slowly, the agents began to build up the reputation they enjoy today for integrity and efficiency.

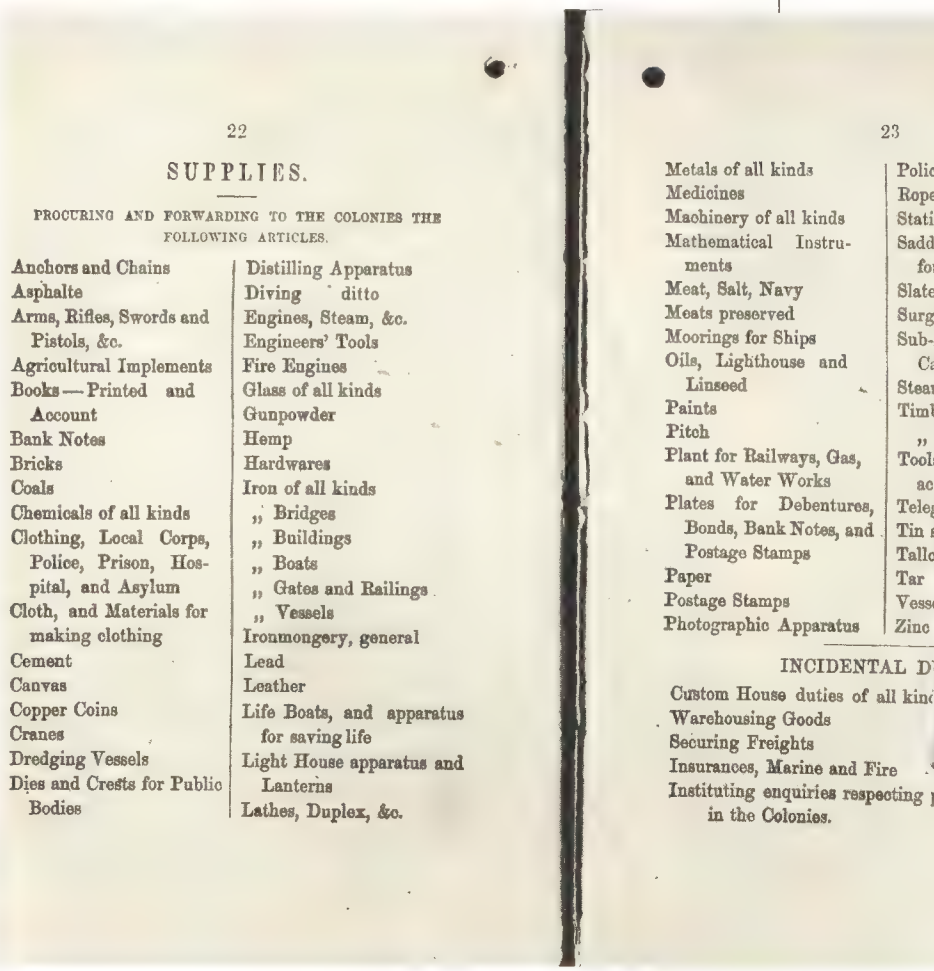
From the 1860s, Crown Agents were generally recruited from outside the Colonial Office and detailed instructions for their guidance were issued by the Treasury. A parliamentary committee of 1908 defined their position as "officers of the Colonial Governments serving in England under the ultimate control of the Secretary of State." As their abilities became more and more obvious and overseas governments increasingly demanded their services, so that "ultimate control" became looser and looser.

TENDER.

THE CROWN AGENTS FOR THE COLONIES,
Whitehall Gardens,
LONDON,
S.W.

Tenders have always been put out by the Crown Agents for the goods they buy. For the really big contracts, the tenders are opened in public.

Sir Maurice Cameron served as junior and senior Crown Agent from 1895 to 1920. Once a military engineer, he quickly saw the colonies' ne for technical assistance and built up the present engineering division.

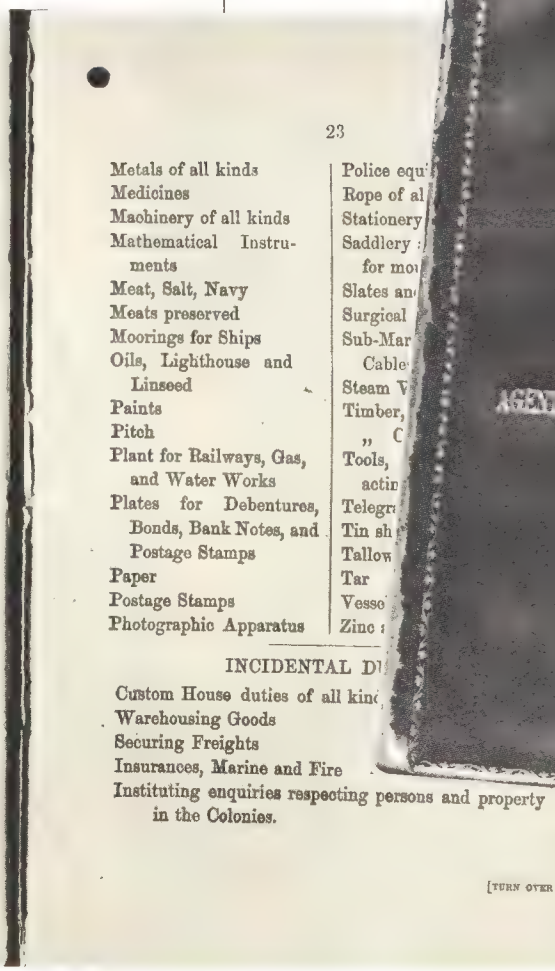


22

SUPPLIES.

PROCURING AND FORWARDING TO THE COLONIES THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES.

Anchors and Chains
Asphalte
Arms, Rifles, Swords and Pistols, &c.
Agricultural Implements
Books — Printed and Account
Bank Notes
Bricks
Coals
Chemicals of all kinds
Clothing, Local Corps, Police, Prison, Hospital, and Asylum
Cloth, and Materials for making clothing
Cement
Canvas
Copper Coins
Cranes
Dredging Vessels
Dies and Crests for Public Bodies
Distilling Apparatus
Diving ditto
Engines, Steam, &c.
Engineers' Tools
Fire Engines
Glass of all kinds
Gunpowder
Hemp
Hardwares
Iron of all kinds
„ Bridges
„ Buildings
„ Boats
„ Gates and Railings
„ Vessels
Ironmongery, general
Lead
Leather
Life Boats, and apparatus for saving life
Light House apparatus and Lanterns
Lathes, Duplex, &c.



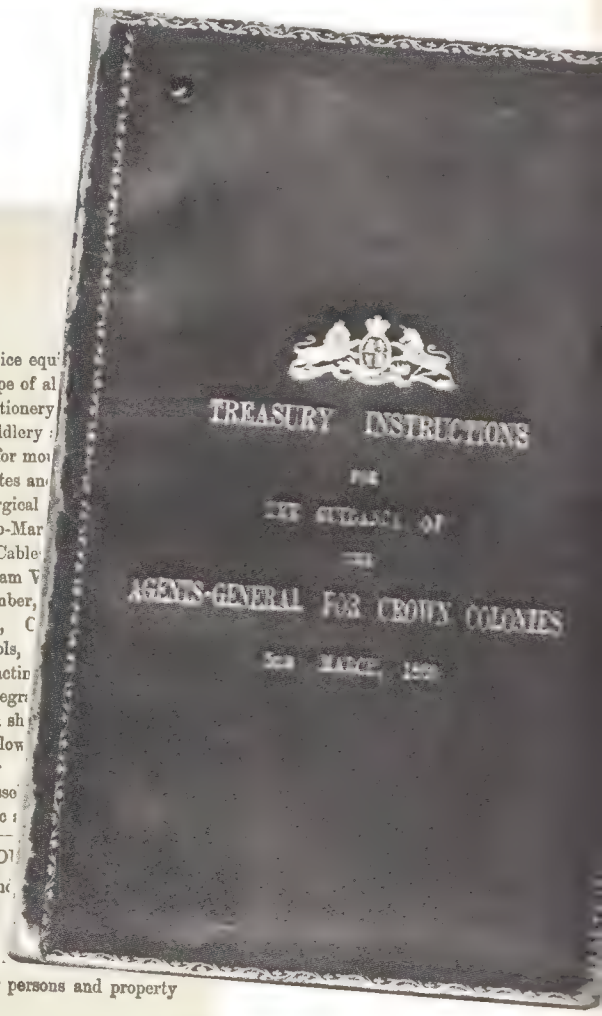
23

Metals of all kinds
Medicines
Machinery of all kinds
Mathematical Instruments
Meat, Salt, Navy
Meats preserved
Moorings for Ships
Oils, Lighthouse and Linseed
Paints
Pitch
Plant for Railways, Gas, and Water Works
Plates for Debentures, Bonds, Bank Notes, and Postage Stamps
Paper
Postage Stamps
Photographic Apparatus
Police equ
Rope of al
Stationery
Saddlery
for mo
Slates an
Surgical
Sub-Mar
Cable
Steam V
Timber,
„ C
Tools,
actin
Telegr
Tin sh
Tallow
Tar
Vesse
Zinc

INCIDENTAL D

Custom House duties of all kin
Warehousing Goods
Securing Freights
Insurances, Marine and Fire
Instituting enquiries respecting persons and property in the Colonies.

[TURN OVER



Pages (left) from the Treasury Instructions (above), issued to guide the Crown Agents in their work, show the variety of goods supplied as early as 1860.

The office in Whitehall Gardens, where the Crown Agents moved in 1903, was the last stop before they moved into their own building at Millbank.

Ten "lady clerks" pose in the Downing Street offices of the Crown Agents, conscious of their role as the emancipated, working women of the 1890s.

This 2s. 3d. duty stamp, supplied by the General Agents was affixed to every firkin of Tasmanian beer, consumed throughout Australia.

A book of stamps, like this one printed for the Transvaal in 1906, was available from the Crown Agents for a charge of 1d. over the cost of the stamps.

This coronation stamp was a second proof, made after a small error was discovered in the size of the lettering on the original.

Licence to Print Money

The Crown Agents organize and supervise the printing under tight security of colonial stamps, banknotes and pre-paid mail from the moment the paper is made until the finished products are safely in the strong rooms of the ship carrying them to their destination.

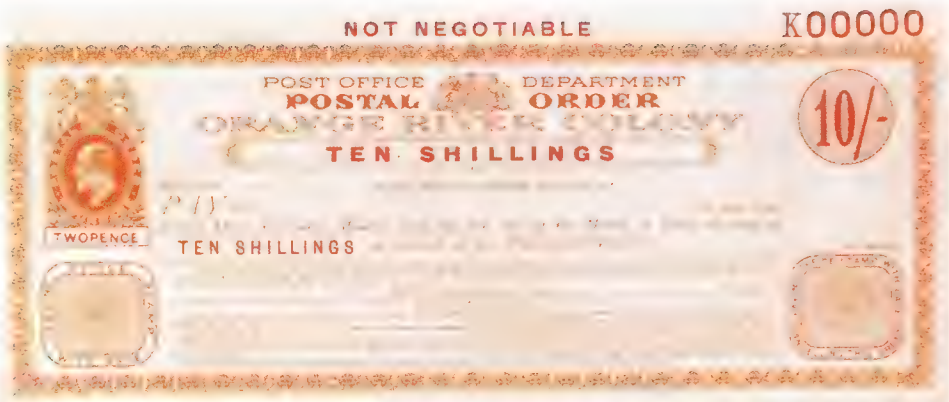
The Crown Agents' vaults in London hold three priceless stamp albums containing a copy of every stamp issued for the British colonies since 1860 and also a comprehensive collection of bank-note specimens. A selection of these are shown here.

Rolls of paper for the stamps are made under the scrutiny of the Crown Agent inspector. Any mistake in the printing – a collector's delight – means a court of inquiry for the inspector. He watches especially closely to ensure that the watermark is incorporated. From the mills the paper goes to the printer to be impressed with the correct design. If the design incorporates the monarch's head, then it has to be approved by Buckingham Palace. King George V, a famous philatelist in his own right, even chose the two colours for the Silver Jubilee issue of 1935. After printing, the stamps are stored in the Crown Agents' own vaults. Finally, the Crown Agents organize transportation overseas.

The Crown Agents' stamp-making activities do more than bring money into Britain: they often prove an investment for the client, for stamp sales to collectors are often a vital source of revenue for small countries. A commemorative issue of 1950 for the Cayman Islands paid for radios for many of the inhabitants.

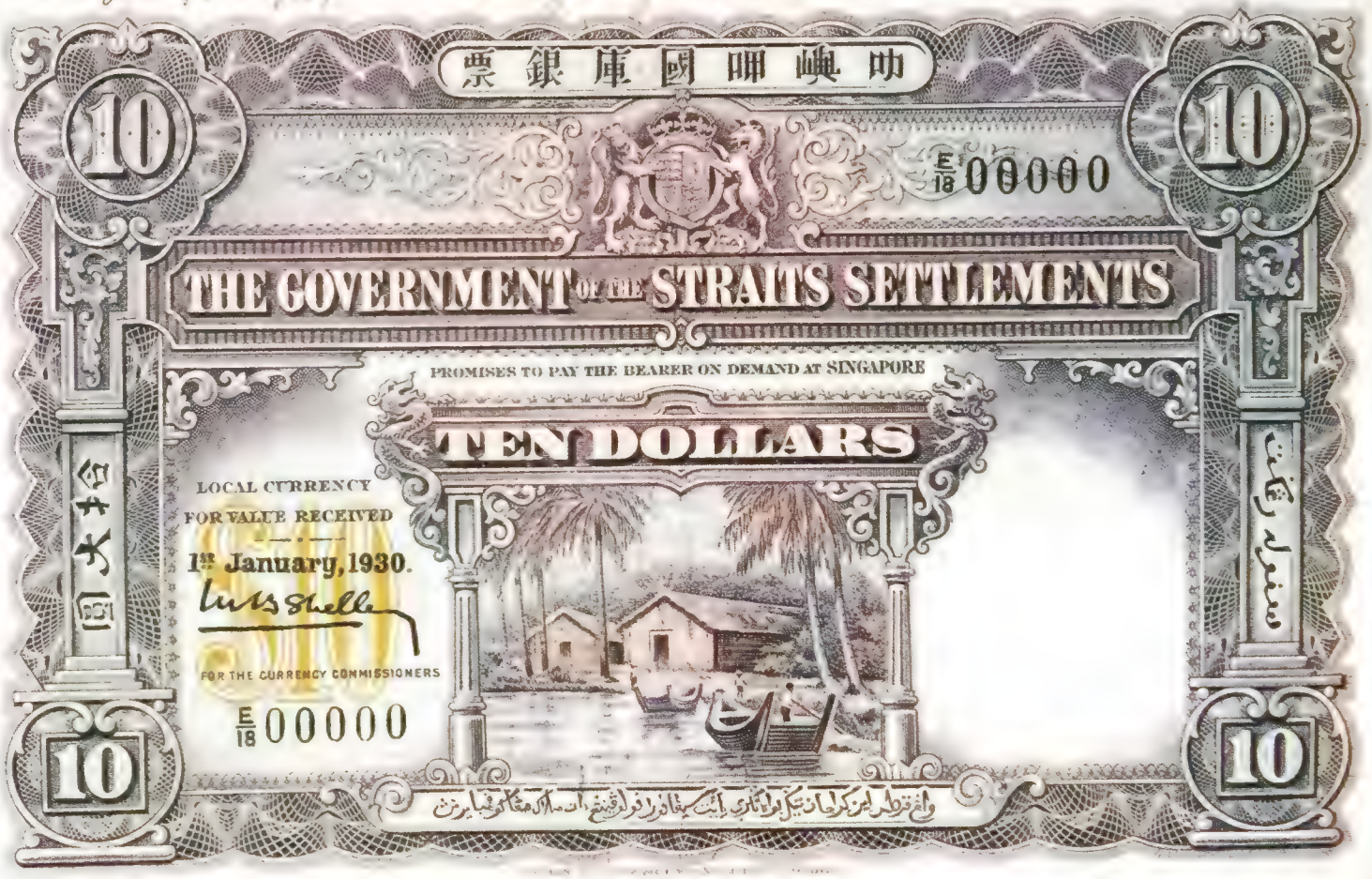
Every kind of pre-printed mail, from postcards to registered letters, was supplied by the versatile Crown Agents.

Three commemorative stamps for Barbados illustrate the skill of the engraver. The top two show Nelson's statue in Barbados, and the lower depicts the supposed arrival of English settlers in 1605. In fact the story is based on an historical error: no settlers arrived until 1627.



Orange River Colony's postal orders had a specially designed border of orange blossoms.

The toucan in this banknote would have been fully checked at the Natural History Museum.

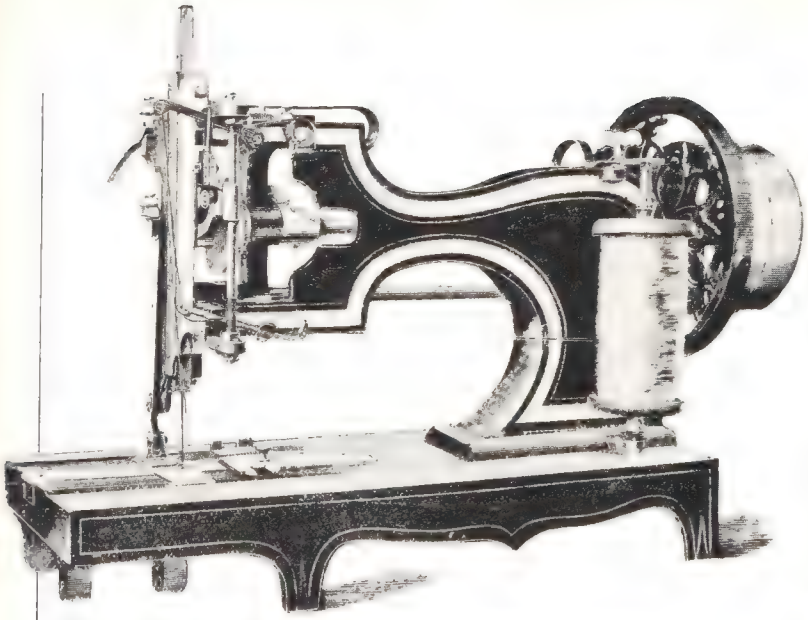


The four languages on the Straits Settlements banknote are English, Chinese, Malay and Hindi, the most common languages used in Singapore.

From Saddles to Sewing Machines

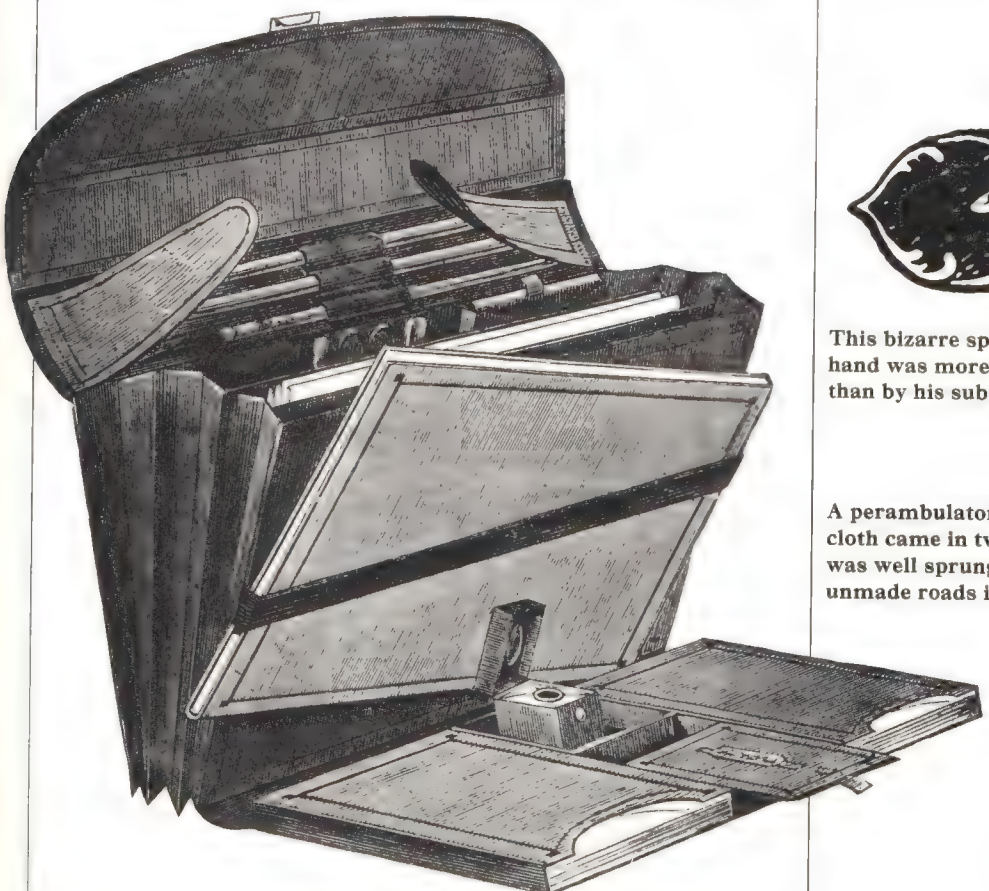
When the Governor of a colony left Government House, travelled to the Courts, attended a garden party or signed papers, his every action was surrounded by reminders of the Crown Agents: the bed he left, the carpet he walked on, the carriage he travelled in the desk he sat at and the ink he wrote with – each one of these items was furnished on request by the Crown Agents, who kept catalogues galore to assist him in his search for any colonial requirement, large or small. Some items from the catalogues are shown on this page.

To acquire an item, the Governor would send an indent to the Crown Agents who passed it on to the Colonial Office for authorization. Eventually the indent returned and the goods were bought. This cumbersome system was altered in the late 19th Century to allow the Crown Agents complete responsibility for purchases under £100. Finally, in 1903, the Crown Agents were given complete autonomy in dealing with their principals.



This particular sewing machine was designed not to mend the petticoats of the Governor's wife, but for sewing and repairing sails and tarpaulins. In remote island colonies, it was a valuable commodity.

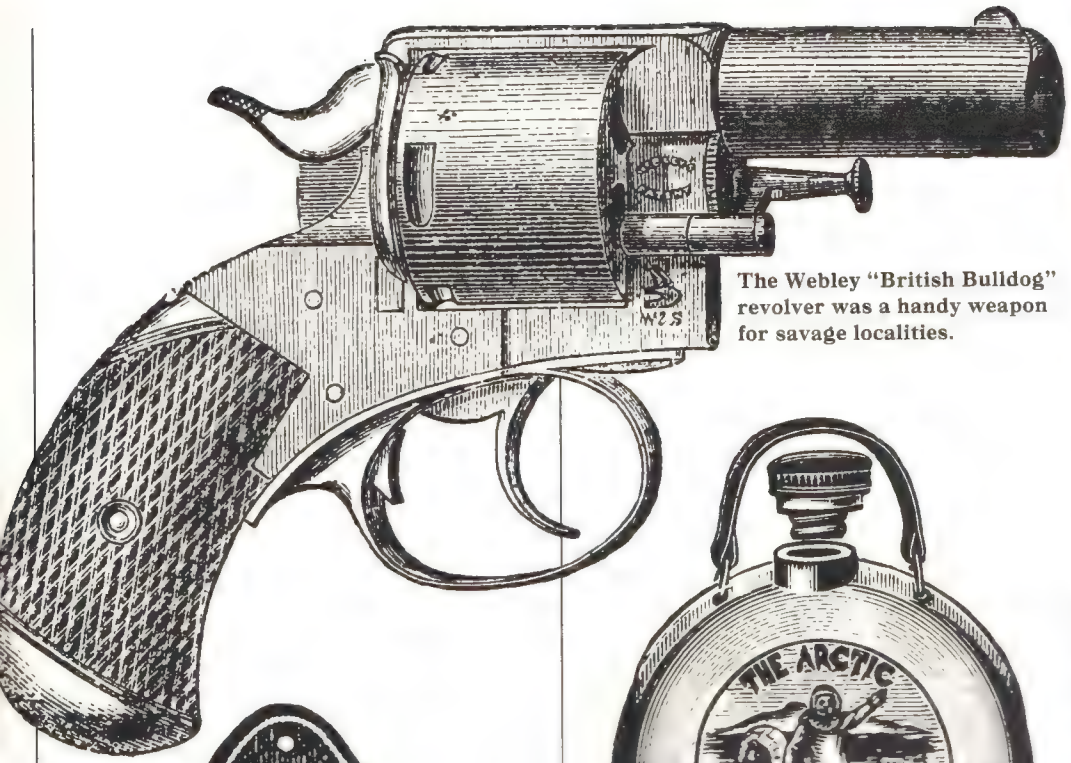
This bizarre spring-clip with its lacquered and bronzed hand was more likely to be used personally by the Governor than by his subordinate secretaries and clerks.



Many a harassed colonial official must have been grateful for this portable case to hold papers ready for signing in spare moments.

A perambulator lined with American leather-cloth came in two sizes, single and double. It was well sprung, in readiness for rough, unmade roads in out-of-the-way places.

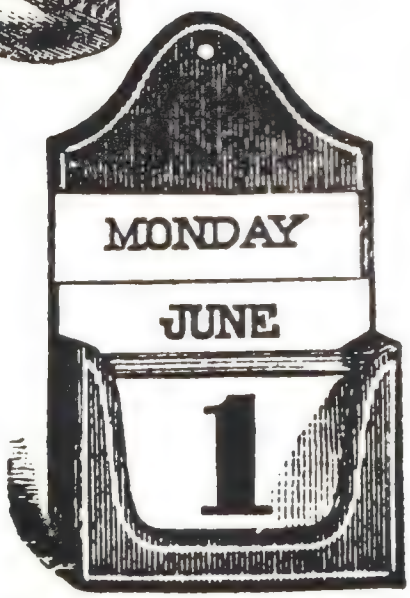
An elegant tent of striped cloth was ideal to protect the ladies from the tropical sun as they watched a game of tennis on the Governor's lawns.



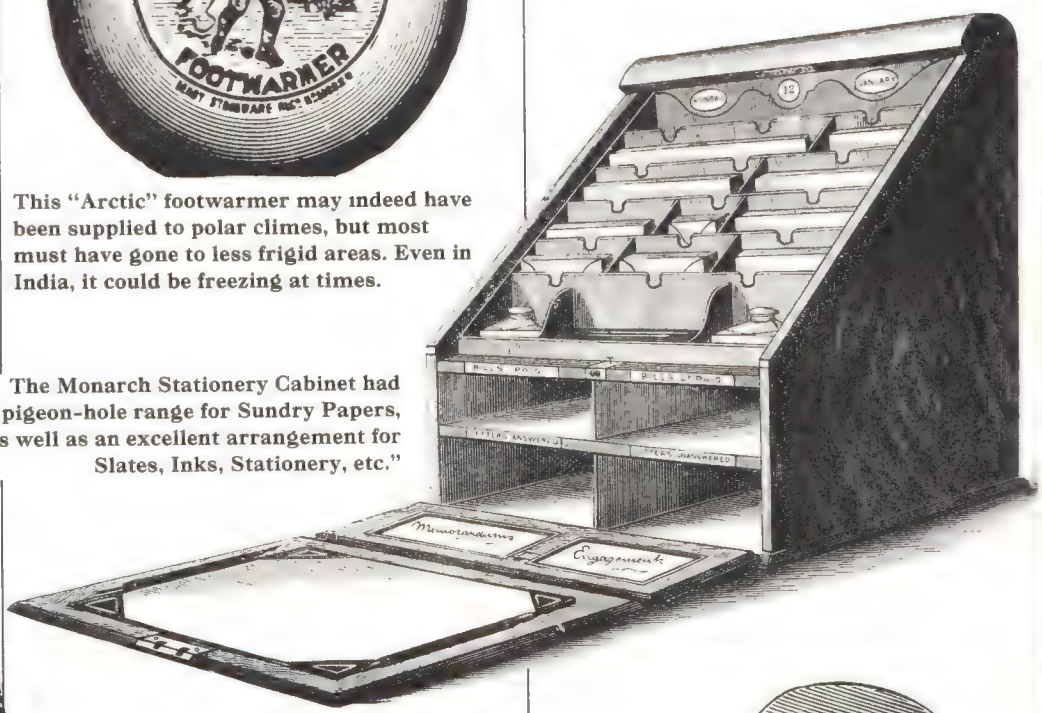
The Webley "British Bulldog" revolver was a handy weapon for savage localities.

This quilted-hogskin lady's saddle with its balance strap and doeskin seat was one of the personal items supplied by the Crown Agents.

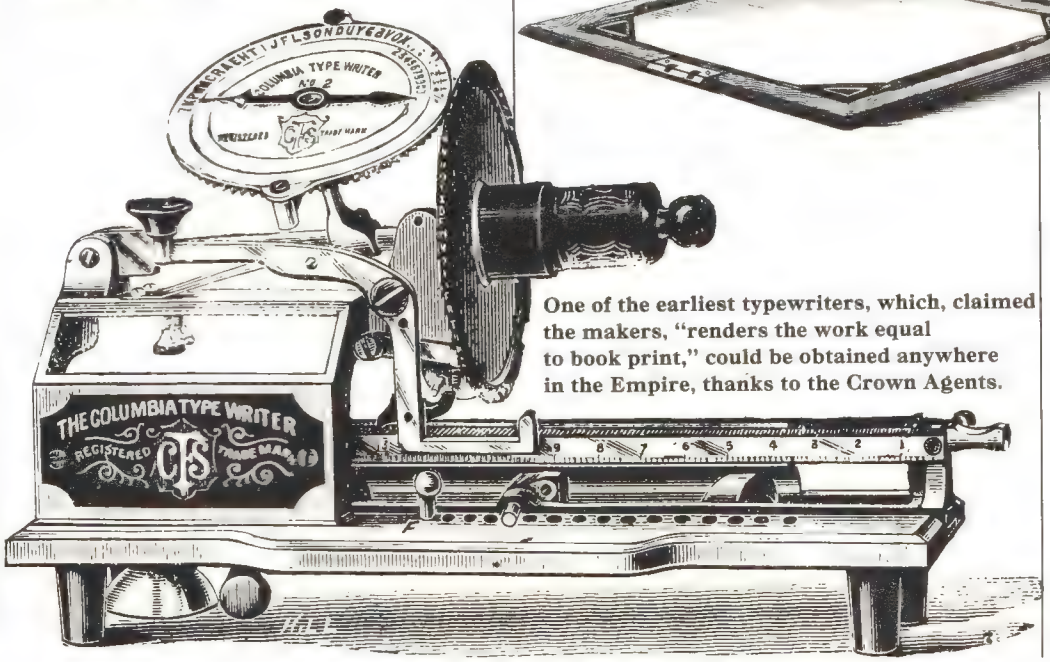
This "Arctic" footwarmer may indeed have been supplied to polar climes, but most must have gone to less frigid areas. Even in India, it could be freezing at times.



The "japan varnish coating" of this date case was more durable than normal finishes in hot or moist climates.



The Monarch Stationery Cabinet had "a pigeon-hole range for Sundry Papers, as well as an excellent arrangement for Slates, Inks, Stationery, etc."



One of the earliest typewriters, which, claimed the makers, "renders the work equal to book print," could be obtained anywhere in the Empire, thanks to the Crown Agents.

Head coverings like this 1s. 9d. sun-shade, made to fit over any type of hat, were supplied in their hundreds and thousands to the tropics.

Patterns for Excellence

Today the Crown Agents owe their phenomenal success to their reputation for quality, a reputation based on the stringent controls imposed on every item they handle.

The system used for purchasing goods, set up in the 19th Century, has remained unchanged. A government or public body sends specifications for the goods it requires to the Crown Agents. The Crown Agents put out tenders and select a firm to produce the goods. Often the chosen firm has to send a sample. When this has been rigidly tested for quality – tests that are frequently repeated – the object is "sealed." A green ribbon is threaded through it and a lead seal is attached, impressed with the same sealer used when the office was first set up. The product, whether a garment, boot, licence plate or pair of handcuffs, receives a pattern number and is placed in a pattern room. This has two purposes: the company producing the goods must keep up to the standard established by the sealed pattern or it will lose the contract; and the pattern acts as a reference for repeat orders from that or other manufacturers.

The sealed pattern is kept in the pattern room for five years after the last repeat order, and is then stored for a further eight years in storerooms before it is finally discarded.

The handsome Zouave jacket, a garment adopted from the fierce Berber regiment of 19th-Century Algeria, was worn by sergeants of the Northern Nigerian police force.

These handcuffs, supplied to the Palestinian police force in 1940, are still in use all over the world today.

For 30 years this cap was the headwear of Mauritian railwaymen.

Both the completed shoe (right) and its constituent parts (above) were taken from the first batch supplied to the Crown Agents and kept, together with a written specification, as a pattern for future manufacturers.

For everyday use this helmet was supplied with a leather chin-strap and a stud to replace the ceremonial metal chain and spike.

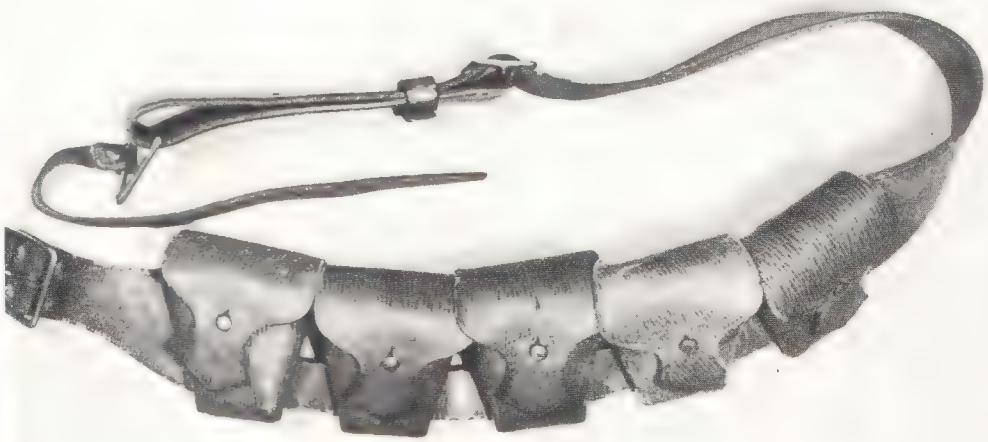
A sealed pattern of this Barbadian bus-driver's armband is still kept by the Crown Agents. Over the years only the date has changed.

A bizarre type of clog with leather uppers was worn by the Trinidadian police, since the wood lasted longer than leather soles.

Varieties of this slouch hat supplied to the Ceylon Post Office in 1953 have been in use all over the world for over 50 years.

Every money-bag supplied for the Jamaican railways had to be of the same quality leather with the same type of lock.

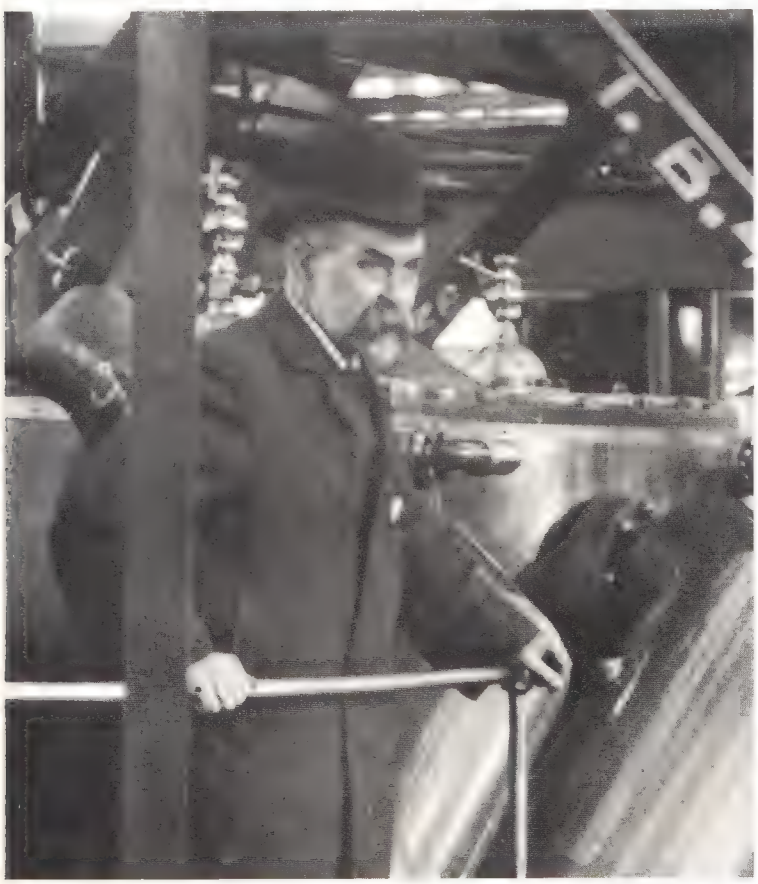
This fez with its gaily coloured tassel is just one of the hundreds of different fezzes supplied by the Crown Agents.



Mounted policemen in many colonies used this standard bandolier to hold their ammunition.

Every taxi in Barbados had to carry one of these metal enamelled plates to show that it was licensed by the government.

The highly sophisticated dredger, the *Quorra* (above), was built on the River Clyde in 1905 for Africa. Every complex detail of its construction was supervised by the Crown Agents' inspector (below).

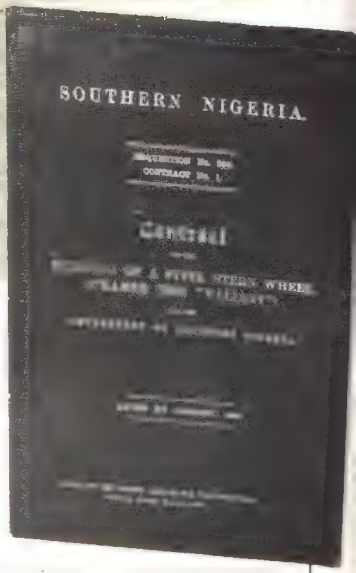


The Imperial Estates

Joseph Chamberlain, the great Colonial Secretary of the 1890s, regarded the colonies as "undeveloped estates." The Crown Agents played a large part in developing them, with enormous engineering projects. During the 19th Century they were concerned mainly with the building of railways, notably those in Ceylon, Queensland and many parts of Africa. Where impenetrable jungle barred the way, steamers were built for rivers. The Crown Agents also took on the job of constructing harbours, and supplying everything from skilled manpower to dredgers.

Horse-drawn trams in Jamaica were later replaced by electric ones.

To supply this floating dry dock was a major project for the Crown Agents,



This gold-embossed contract (right) between the government of Southern Nigeria and the Crown Agents authorized the building of the stern-wheel steamer, the *Valiant*, which is seen above, steaming up the River Niger.

who had it built and towed across the Atlantic to Port of Spain, Trinidad.

A railway through the Kelani Valley in Ceylon carried tea and rubber.

Agents for the World

As the British territories gained their independence one by one, the Crown Agents might have disappeared. But today they act for over 80 foreign governments and nearly 200 public bodies. The new look – international rather than colonial – can be dated from 1932 when Iraq, mandated to Britain in 1920, was given her independence. The new government wanted to carry on using the Crown Agents' services, the Foreign Office agreed, and for the first time the Crown Agents became agents for a foreign country.

The Crown Agents have an amazingly wide-ranging variety of activities, of which these pages show only a sample. In recent years they have supplied locomotives worth millions of pounds to East African Railways and ten queen bees to Samoa. Indeed, as they point out with dry civil-service humour, they will soon be celebrating "the fiftieth anniversary of the first Q.B.O.E. (Queen Bee for Overseas Export)." They handle funds of over £1,000 million and place orders worth about £100 million a year, but make only just enough in fees to run the office.

Their work is by no means confined to the supply of stores of various kinds. Equally important are the technical advisory services they provide. Though it has not happened yet, they do not doubt that one day they will be asked to supply parts for spaceships. Nor do they doubt their ability to meet the order.

The new earth-satellite communications station at Sentosa in Singapore, whose antenna is shown here, was tested by the Crown Agents.

Nigerian prison officers examine uniforms, belts, hats, shoes and belt lockets – all items procured for them by the Crown Agents.

A die is made for a medal for South Georgia to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Antarctic explorer, Sir Ernest Shackleton.

George Bil, a Crown Agents' inspector in Hong Kong, examines a consignment of so-called NATO steel helmets, made to the NATO pattern but in fact destined for use in all parts of the world.

George Bil carefully checks the quality of garments made in Hong Kong. Though garments were his speciality while he was in London, he has to be prepared to examine anything in his service abroad.

Here Bil examines "holloware," anything from billycans to water containers. The Crown Agents shop all over the world to find the best value.

II. Servants of the Crown

Candidates for the colonial civil service were selected for character as much as for intelligence. Since there was no training for the jobs they had to do, and they had to learn by experience, or trial and error, successful candidates were expected to be adaptable all-rounders, with an ability to lead and decide. In the late Victorian period and well into the 20th Century, these were qualities commonly regarded as being present exclusively in the products of the public schools and the universities. The referee who described a candidate as a good type of "English Public School man" was ensuring that he would be looked upon with a sympathetic eye. "He rowed in the Cambridge eight" was evidently considered an important qualification in the 1880s.

In the 20th Century, recruitment to the colonial services was for a long time the responsibility of Sir Ralph Furse, who had been captain of his house at Eton and was a graduate, he tells us, of an "illustrious college at Oxford." Furse has described at length the relatively straightforward and effective methods that he took over and developed. A candidate might call into the office before sending in his papers, and a succinct note about him would be entered into a small diary. One, for example, was described as "prosy and lugubrious. He talked about his organs, wishing for a lonely life on an island." Furse and his colleagues sat in a large room overlooking Downing Street. They sat as far apart as they could, so that a candidate would not feel he was being overheard by others and so that each interviewer could help his colleagues by unobtrusively watching the other's candidate from a different angle. Furse's defence of what, on the face of it, appears to have been an insidious system, has been echoed by Sir Cosmo Parkinson, who affirmed that "the selection was done solely on the basis of merit: influence played no part whatever." The sceptic, perhaps, would suggest that doubts about this recruiting system arise from the assumptions of the recruiting officers about what constituted merit.

The Colonial Office appears to have felt that the colonial services were much inferior to the Indian Civil Service, and it lacked confidence in the men it sent to tropical Africa. Salaries were lower than in the Indian Civil Service, even in West Africa, which, with its reputation as "the white man's grave," inflated its salaries to help compensate for the unhealthy climate. Recruitment standards for some colonies were much lower than for others: an army officer who lost his commission as a result of a canteen brawl was accepted in the Gold Coast constabulary; another who absconded with regimental funds became a customs collector in British Guiana. And yet, in many ways, the duties in the less favoured territories were the most onerous and exacting. A man might find himself playing the roles of policeman, doctor, lawyer, confidant, engineer and agricultural expert all at once.

Distance and the slowness of communications, especially in the earlier part of the 19th Century, meant that most colonial territories were, in practice, left to be governed by the men on the spot. It was absurd, as Lord Grey admitted, to attempt to administer the Empire from a block of offices in Whitehall. The Colonial Office decided the general principles by which the territories should be governed and was able in the long run to dampen down and rectify any excesses that might creep into the day-to-day administration by wayward individuals and governors. Sir John Pope-Hennessy, for the Colonial Office a most exasperating colonial Governor, habitually disobeyed or ignored instructions with which he disagreed, and locked unwelcome dispatches in a drawer, unanswered. But even with governors like Pope-Hennessy, the Colonial Office felt obliged to support the man on the spot in so far as it was possible, providing he had not flouted his instructions to a grotesque degree.

The government in a colony, therefore, was the primary responsibility of the Governor. In a Crown colony it meant the direct personal rule of the Governor. "All power and all responsibility are centred in him," declared Sir Anton Bertram in 1929. "After the necessary preliminary interval in which he is acquainting himself with local conditions, he personally directs and inspires the whole policy of his regime." There was room for manoeuvre between the Governor and the Colonial Office, but each functioned in such different contexts that occasional misunderstanding was inevitable. The Colonial Office was one cog in a slow-moving and complex governmental machine, seeing problems from the vantage-point of London and the impinging pressures of European as well as national politics. It must have frequently appeared an obtuse and intransigent institution to men who were grappling with the grass-roots problems of colonial administration.

Not least of the pressures on the colonial Governor and his administrators was that of adapting to life in a strange environment, something of which the men in the Colonial Office knew nothing. In the African territories, they were generally obliged to surrender family life, or even the prospect of it. There were psychological strains involved in living a life away from home in different, if often beautiful, surroundings, while planning for retirement back in the country of one's boyhood. The Governor and his wife were under a special social responsibility. Margaret Brooke of Sarawak held a tea for her English friends every Tuesday afternoon. The conversation, she confesses, was not very exciting, but it possessed one remarkable characteristic: "they appeared to take little or no interest in the affairs relating to the country, but would wax quite enthusiastic when someone would announce, how, with a great good fortune, he had induced a small half-ripe strawberry to appear on a plant he had brought from England! With flowers it was just the same. 'Only think' another would say, 'You know the red geranium shoots I brought from England? Well, I do believe we shall be able to get at least four blooms!' 'Really? How splendid!' the others would reply admiringly. This in the midst of the exquisite prodigality of the tropics. They all wanted to be oh, so English."

Next to the Governor in the chain of command within a colony was the colonial secretary or chief secretary. He was the Governor's principal lieutenant, ran the administration in the Governor's absence and headed the local bureaucracy. He led the legislative council, where he defended the government's policy, and in many ways functioned in a role approximating to that of a Prime

Minister. He was a permanent holder of office, did not move on to another territory after a certain term of, say, six years, as a Governor did, and therefore supplied useful experience and a sense of continuity in a territory's local administration. He was assisted by junior officers working in a secretariat that co-ordinated the various departments of government and handled the correspondence with the Colonial Office. If he disagreed strongly with the Governor on a matter, then the probable consequence was disruption in the colonial administration and extreme perturbation in Whitehall.

In addition to the colonial or chief secretary, there were other officers of government essential to the proper management of affairs. The most important were the attorney-general, treasurer, medical officer, chief justice, auditor and clerks of the executive and legislative councils. At the next level, surveyors, coroners, postmasters and magistrates were usually recruited from local candidates and their appointments confirmed by the Colonial Office.

The man in immediate contact with the subject peoples, however, was the district officer. He was the governmental representative whom they met and knew. He needed to be a man of exceptional adaptability to cope with the varied duties he was called upon to perform. This meant, by the criteria of the exclusive Colonial Office circles of the period, that he had been to a public school and probably to a university, institutions which, in the view of Lord Lugard, one of the most notable of colonial governors, "produced an English gentleman with an almost passionate conception of fair play, of protection of the weak, and of 'playing the game'." This education was also expected to have taught him personal initiative and resourcefulness, qualities required in order to live among the natives and exercise his very varied responsibilities. One district officer had to execute seven men and marry five couples in one and the same day. "In an isolated station," wrote Lugard, "he may have to discharge the functions of all the departments – postal, customs, police and engineering – in addition to his normal work. He is the medium of communication between the military or departmental officer and the native chiefs in matters of labour and supplies, and is specially charged to see that labourers are fully paid and properly treated. To him alike the missionary, the trader and the miner look for assistance and advice. The leper and the slave find in him a protector." Sir Frank Swettenham, who became Governor of the Straits Settlements, similarly stressed the variety of tasks a district officer might be obliged to undertake: "He was liable to be called upon at any moment of the day or night to go anywhere and do anything. The curious thing is that the men who held these posts, though they had passed no comprehensive examination, and had no special training for the work, somehow managed to do what was required of them, and in most cases did it extremely well."

The administration provided by these men at all levels was normally efficient and responsible in most colonies, but no one pretended that the colonial services as a whole were in the same class as the Indian Civil Service. The colonial services suffered by comparison. Their salaries were unattractive when measured against those in India, and the failure to create a unified colonial service with common standards, salary scales and conditions of service, and ready interchange between one territory and another, resulted in the development of a recognizable league table of desirability, with West Africa consistently at the bottom. The Indian and Eastern civil services recruited the best men, and the other colonial services acquired the rest. In India the senior civil servants were forbidden to own land or participate in commercial activity, but in the rest of the colonial Empire there were no such restrictions. Senior civil servants in many colonies acquired a considerable business stake in the communities they administered and, necessarily, a common interest with the local, expatriate commercial and planting classes. They mixed with the white planters and traders at the social and business levels and, if they married, they did so into this section of the community. They were identifiable as allies of the local white landowners and propertied and commercial classes.

In many areas, of course, it was physically impossible to administer countless peoples directly through British officers. Even the district officers were to some extent in the hands of their interpreters and their police. Sir Charles Orr, who served in Northern Nigeria, and became Governor of the Bahamas, believes it would have been impossible to have set up a wholly effective alien rule in Northern Nigeria in 1900, when it was taken over from its chartered company: "A European staff, large enough to administer the country and collect all the taxes, would have been so costly as to be out of the question, nor, with the country unmapped, unexplored and practically unknown would such a staff have had (were they disposed) sufficient knowledge to enable them to do so."

A solution to this problem was the concept of indirect rule, which had its classical exposition in Nigeria, but was also influential in other British territories in Africa and in the Malay States, and was applied in New Guinea under Sir William MacGregor. The concept entailed the bestowal by the imperial government of administrative and judicial powers on traditional tribal authorities, who had run affairs before European intrusion and who were recognized by the native peoples. The imperial officials retained reserve powers enabling them to interfere when necessary, but in general the people and their tribal authorities were expected to conduct their own administration. The central government imposed taxes, but they were collected by the native authorities who met their expenses out of them. It was, therefore, a cheap method of administering a colonial territory and, it was argued, had the advantage of giving the natives the experience of governing themselves. In this way, it could readily be linked with the principle of trusteeship to educate the natives in the management of affairs. It was criticized on the grounds that it was often corrupt, venal and tyrannical. Lord Lugard admitted after the First World War that naked and unashamed bribery and corruption existed in Northern Nigeria: "village headships are being bought and sold. Taxes are being embezzled, and district heads and satellites are having the time of their recent lives." Native authorities

Miles of red tape – actually closer to pink in colour – helped tie the Empire together, and occasionally tangle it up, for over 200 years.

sometimes hindered or obstructed native education, and some were naturally more concerned to please the imperial power on which they depended than to advance the welfare and good government of the people in their charge. Nevertheless, colonial administration everywhere had to rely to some extent on co-operation from native leaders.

One factor that did make for more immediate control over colonial administration by the generally remote and academic central authority in Whitehall was the improvement in communications. As the 19th Century wore on, ships travelled faster and services between British and colonial ports increased in frequency. By the end of the century the sailing time between Southampton and Cape Town was cut to 17 days, and mail between London and Sydney that had taken six weeks in 1875 was taking only a month. A more efficient transmission of mails by sea was accompanied in the later years of the 19th Century by the introduction of submarine cables and the use of the telegraph. A submarine telegraph connected Britain and Ireland in 1853, and another connected Ireland and Newfoundland in 1866. Telegraphic communication between London and India was in operation by 1870 and the lines quickly extended to Singapore and thence to Hong Kong and Australia. Most dispatches continued to be sent by sea, for the telegraph was expensive and regarded by some as unreliable, but the Colonial Office employed it more and more towards the turn of the century. The speed of communication made possible by the telegraph placed the methodical and cautious machinery of the Colonial Office under considerable strain. Problems were placed on the desks of the Colonial Office staff almost as soon as they arose, and the old leisurely procedure of circulating the papers and pondering a reply was no longer adequate. The Colonial Office was now being placed at the centre of developments as they happened, and the atmosphere became one of almost continual crisis, with the decision-making process under pressure to be speedy and prompt.

With all its stresses and tribulations, however, the imperial machine worked effectively. No one ran the Empire, but the team that operated the imperial machine, from the Secretaries of State and their staff in Whitehall to the Viceroy in India or the district officer and tribal authorities in Nigeria, gave the Empire a style of administration that had much to recommend it. Nevertheless, the inclusion of natives in the upper ranks of the machine had scarcely begun, and British rule was regarded as being, for all practical purposes, permanent. "Localization" was not yet a word for imperial administrators to use freely.

The assumption that the European was inherently superior to tropical peoples was not easily modified. But in the 20th Century, under the influence of the League of Nations mandates philosophy and Lugard's exposition of the *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, published in 1922, there was a growing awareness that the possession of colonies in underdeveloped parts of the world carried duties and responsibilities to the native populations, whose interest should be paramount, and that the Empire should not be considered merely as a vehicle for uplifting British racial pride or for extending British territorial and economic power. Sir Cosmo Parkinson, when reflecting on the Colonial Office and the Empire he has known, quotes the Ordinary Man in Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*: "We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity." The British imperial order in the 19th Century was not devoid of humanity, nor was it rich in it. It was pragmatic and to a large extent impersonal. It gave its subjects security, justice, impartiality and peace. It was tied hand and foot by the prevailing liberal creed of laissez-faire – "leave well alone." Consequently, it did not always give prosperity and it did not offer rapid constitutional, social and political advance to the subject peoples.

Private, Royal Marines, 1815